

Constructing Transsexuality:
Discursive Manoeuvres through
Psycho-Medical, Transgender, and Queer Texts

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ABSTRACT

Transsexuality is understood variously as a psycho-medical phenomenon, as an identity category, and as a postmodern challenge to notions of gender and identity. As transsexuality is discursively constituted through each of these frames of reference, different assertions are made about what transsexuality is. Each of these ontological statements carries different implications for "transsexuals". By employing queer and poststructuralist feminist critiques which unsettle "knowledge" about transsexuality, this thesis becomes part of a wider project of exploring the crevices in the process of (normative) gendering. I work closely with transsexual and transgender texts to engage with political and theoretical issues arising out of specific attempts to define transsexuality theoretically or to deploy the transsexual figure politically. Some of these texts are transcripts of taped interviews and a workshop conducted with transsexual and transgendered people in Aotearoa / New Zealand. I begin by introducing the thesis and situating it relative to other literatures on transsexuality. I then offer a discussion of epistemological and methodological questions, and describe the research process. I critique psycho-medical definitions of "transsexuality" and then discuss critically debates among transgender theorists and activists. My analysis of the various diagnostic classifications of transsexuality highlights problematic ways in which transsexuals' erotic attractions have been constructed or overlooked. Through my discussion of transsexuality as a case of being "trapped in the wrong body", I suggest ways in which both transgender and psycho-medical theorising could work more critically with understandings of transsexual embodiment. By engaging with selected transgender texts, I identify ways in which transgender theorising and political ventures could be strengthened: by opening up to theorising about the signifiatory importance of sex reassignment surgery, by negotiating carefully the inclusivity (or exclusivity) of the term "transgender", and by challenging ethnocentricity in transgender theorising. I discuss contentious assumptions about the interactions between transgender theorising and queer theorising, emphasising the importance of developing theorising about "sexuality" and "gender" that does not become mired in the language and politics of identity. I present this thesis as a multi-vocal discussion of the ways in which transsexuality is constructed within various clinical, academic, and political settings. Throughout the thesis I engage with "transgender theorising" - a

recent body of political and analytic writing. This intersection of theorising and activism opens up discussion about the political implications of gender-crossing and the power dynamics in which transsexuals are imbricated on entering the psycho-medical arena. By engaging in this transdisciplinary discussion, I seek to open up possibilities for transgendered ways of being: possibilities that can no longer be defined through frameworks of diagnosis and disorder.

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PART ONE

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Transsexuality has been constructed variously, throughout the latter half of the twentieth century, as a psychiatric disorder, as an identity category, and as the basis for a political movement. Riding partly on the wave of feminist, gay, lesbian, and bisexual challenges to oppressive constructions of sexuality and gender, transgenderists have begun to articulate political challenges to the specific kinds of “gender oppression” they face.¹ Within the last decade, those wishing to develop a theoretical framework for challenging this “gender oppression” have introduced transgender politics and theorising into academic fora (Bornstein, 1995; Halberstam, 1994; Hale, 1998; MacKenzie, 1994; Namaste, 1996; Nataf, 1996; Stryker, 1994, 1998; Rubin, 1998; Stone, 1991; Prosser, 1998).

According to some authors, transsexuality has come into being through twentieth century medical technologies that enable “sex-change” (Hausman, 1995), yet for other authors transsexuality is part of a broader sociocultural phenomenon which exists transhistorically and transculturally (Feinberg, 1996). Rather than privileging either of these approaches, I focus on the interactions between such theoretical constructions of transsexuality / transgenderism.

Throughout this thesis I work through various issues and debates of concern to transpeople, foregrounding the risks of approaching transsexuality from uncritical ontological assumptions. I highlight specific academic approaches to transsexuality, discussing how these approaches engage with one another and how each of them maintains (or challenges) assumptions about what “gender” is, what “transsexuality”

¹ Feinberg (1996, pp.130-163) specifically identifies several “transgender warriors”, describing some of the political challenges they present.

is, and who “counts” as transgendered. I take a critical approach to theorising and work within a poststructural framework in terms of how I articulate and pursue questions of interest.

I support transgender efforts to challenge normative practices which marginalise transpeople, and pay careful attention to their political claims, however I also engage in critique. This critique of transsexual and transgender texts is not for the purpose of undermining their political goals, but in the interests of presenting challenges through which the theoretical articulation of those goals might become more comprehensive. I envisage that associated political practices may be informed by insights available from other identity-based political movements.

By working with notions of “identity” and “gender” informed by poststructuralist understandings, I position this thesis critically relative to *studies on transsexuality* and relative to *transgender studies*. I distinguish between these two broad approaches to writing about and researching transsexuality for the purpose of highlighting their different political agendas. The project here is to critique discourses that ontologise² transsexuality and those discourses that seek to politicise transsexuality by constructing a unifying concept of transsexuality which invariably becomes a hegemonic discourse.

I see it as important to the current research to work from the experiences of transsexuals³ as articulated by them, but to always situate those experiences discursively, maintaining a critical awareness of the “repressive mechanisms” (Scott,

² Throughout the thesis, I use the term “ontologise” to highlight the positivist assumption that “transsexuality” can be “known”, identified, diagnosed, or studied as a fixed and certain entity. By critiquing this assumption, I suggest that multiple possibilities for gendering may exist, with the implication that gendering can no longer be understood in an essentialist sense as fixed or discrete, but must be reconceptualised as an ongoing process.

³ Both male-to-female and female-to-male transsexuals are included whenever I write “transsexuals” without further qualification.

1992) involved in the construction of transsexuality. A key source facilitating my critical reading of psycho-medical, transgender, and queer texts on transsexuality are interview and workshop transcripts generated as part of this research.

Through my readings of interview and workshop material, and queer and transgender writings, I have come to realise the risks involved in any attempt to characterise “transsexual” perspectives. Therefore, rather than attempting to produce a representative text, I discuss critically various approaches to transsexuality. In particular, I question their theoretical underpinnings, their political implications, and their investments in discourses that ontologise transsexuality.

My analysis of transcripts and of other transgender texts stems from my commitment to aspects of queer and transgender political projects while retaining a critical distance from how such projects are articulated and carried out. I focus on how transsexuality is situated through psycho-medical discourses (in Part Three), the politics of transgenderism (in Part Four), and the academic field of queer theory (in Part Five). Each of these three broad approaches to transsexuality forms a critical ground and a knowledge frame through which transsexuality may be defined, understood, “known”. I employ queer and poststructuralist feminist critiques to unsettle “knowledge” about transsexuality and to expose as processes of construction the ways in which such knowledge has been produced. I perceive this as part of the wider project of seeking out the crevices in the process of (normative) gendering, and therefore present this as a work of political as much as academic significance. The viability of this project relies upon a simultaneous destabilising and redeployment of terms such as “experience”, “knowledge”, “gender”, and “identity”.

In working from poststructuralist critiques of “knowledge” and “theory”, I draw on a variety of texts to discuss the theorising of transsexuality without proposing to formulate a grand theory myself. On the contrary, I unsettle others’ attempts to claim privileged “knowledge” of transsexuality; whether on the basis of identity (“the only people who can ever really know about transsexuality are transsexuals themselves”), professional status (as in a psycho-medical research or clinical setting), or academic credentials (as in sociologists, anthropologists and queer theorists who write about

transsexuality). For the purpose of unsettling exclusive knowledge-claims, I read various queer, psycho-medical, transgender, and transsexual texts alongside one another. I argue that this engagement across disciplines is important for all involved in making sense of transgender phenomena: whether as clinicians, political activists and/or academics.

In framing my thesis so that *any* claims to epistemic privilege are suspect I am questioning the ways in which knowledge operates in the discursive construction of transsexuality. However, I want also to indicate that I am not entirely convinced that this thesis is immune to its own critiques of claims for epistemic privilege. Indeed, in the final chapter I question the very implications of discussions (of which this thesis is part) of transsexuality within academia.

Through this thesis, I discuss important issues for transsexual people in a way that hopefully opens up possibilities for discussion across disciplines: among academics and psycho-medical clinicians, among queer and transgender theorists, among activists and academics. Engaging in such a discussion from a critical and explicitly politicised perspective means critiquing, through a Foucauldian understanding of the knowledge / power dynamic, the power relationships among various parties who construct transsexuality / transgenderism.

Research Context

This research has been taking place during an era of increasingly vocal demands from transsexual and transgendered people: demands for surgery, demands for the legal right to alter identification papers (with or without surgery), and demands for anti-discrimination laws to protect transpeople (Currah, 1997). To some extent these demands form part of a wider political movement which concerns all “queer” sexualities and genders. Yet, in some ways transsexual / transgender politics stand apart from “queer” politics. This is due partly to a fear some transsexuals have of associating their concerns with the stigmas attached to homosexuality, and partly to

the fact that for many “non-transsexual queers”, it takes enough effort to forge alliances among diverse gay, lesbian and bisexual parties, without also trying to accommodate the (often invisible) transsexual elements of our wider queer communities.⁴

The political actions of transsexual and transgendered people, both in Australasia and further afield, seem to consist of two main strands. One strand revolves around arguments that sex reassignment surgery (SRS) should be **more readily available**, as an issue of human rights. The other strand argues (with some intersexual activists) that surgery should **not be necessary** for transpeople.⁵ Two connected arguments are that legal gender transition should be possible without surgical sex reassignment, and that having SRS for the purpose of passing is perpetuating a system where transsexuals invest in the limited gender options by which they are restricted. Thus the question of “transsexual politics” is by no means a simple one.

In Aotearoa / New Zealand, the situation for transsexual people may be affected by alterations to the health system which put far more onus than before on the “customer” to pay for services. This problem may be exacerbated by the fact that there are very few centres or professionals in Aotearoa / New Zealand who are actually equipped to offer services which meet the needs or demands of transsexual clients. There are no “Gender Identity Clinics” in Aotearoa / New Zealand and transsexuals seeking

⁴The perpetual struggle among different parties of the “queer alliance” means that a hierarchy of exclusion operates whereby transgender people are often the last to be included. Just as some lesbian authors criticise queer for being a gay-male venture (Danuta-Walters, 1996), and some bisexual theorists are concerned that queer operates as an exclusively gay-lesbian alliance, so some transgenderists argue that queer marginalises transsexual / transgender people (Namaste, 1996). This is a discussion I take up in greater detail in Part Five.

⁵In mentioning “intersexual activists”, I am referring to the very recent moves towards intersex-visibility. For example, the Intersex Society of North America and the Intersex Trust of Aotearoa / New Zealand have both been established during the 1990s and both make human rights claims relating to the medical treatment of intersexed people.

surgery, particularly female-to-male (FTM) transsexuals, complain about surgical technologies not being available here as rapidly as they are in the U.S.A.. Therefore, many transsexuals seeking specialised health care in Aotearoa / New Zealand have to consider not only the cost of “treatments”, but also the extra costs of travel and accommodation. The effect of having a small national population is that, even in the largest centres, it is likely that a transsexual individual will be very isolated, with limited support systems available among transsexuals themselves and no formal, public support systems at all. Also, as much of the political literature relating to transsexuality is produced in the U.S.A. and Britain, and is not readily available locally, many transsexual people in Aotearoa / New Zealand are likely to be unaware of the kinds of political actions and debates occurring internationally in the name of “transsexuality” and “transgenderism”.

Transsexuality as a Category: Construction and Critique

Wherever there exists the assumption that people “fit into” gender categories, there also exist phenomena of gender-crossing and gender liminality. “Transsexuality” is one of many words which describe this phenomenon. In other times and cultural locations, gender-crossing and liminality may have been more to do with social role than anatomy. The enormous development of surgical (and hormonal) technologies in the twentieth century has meant that “transsexuals”, unlike their counterparts from other times and places, may undergo considerable anatomical changes in the pursuit of effecting a “sex change”. However, “changing” sex has not always been the issue. In many cultural contexts, there exists (or has existed) a sanctioned role for those who live between genders. Seton (1991) notes various gender liminal phenomena in non-western cultures, such as the Acault (Burma), Xanith (Oman), Hijra (India), Berdache (Indigenous American people), Mahu (Polynesia), fa’afafine (Samoa), and Sarombavy (Madagascar). In tribal cultures, gender liminal people tend to be revered for their spiritual powers. In Western antiquity, too, there are records of men who were not considered as men and who were regarded as holy seers (e.g., Hippocrates’ writings about Phrygian and Scythian “non-men”). Writings about the deity “Venus Castina” -

the goddess of female souls trapped in male bodies - indicate that transsexuality existed (at least in the realm of popular imagination) long before surgical technologies brought into being the “transsexual” figure of the late twentieth century. According to Seton (1991), primitive attempts at surgically changing sex were performed in response to early transsexuals' "cross-gendered drives", the earliest recorded of which occurred in ancient Rome.

Cauldwell (1949) has often been attributed with introducing the term "transsexual" into sexological literature. However, recent research indicates that Hirschfeld coined the term transsexualism in 1923.⁶ Nevertheless, the label only became prominent in the 1950's when transsexuality was differentiated from transvestism as a medical syndrome. In Cauldwell's view, transsexuality was both caused by, and indicative of, mental ill-health. He saw transsexuality as the result of an inborn deficiency within the individual and claimed that it would be criminal to remove transsexuals' healthy body tissue (i.e., to perform SRS). Whilst this view has always existed in the medical community, there have also been medical professionals who have responded favourably to transsexuals' demands for surgery and hormone treatment. The efforts of these individuals, and the new technologies that have come out of their willingness to respond to transsexuals' pleas for “treatment”, have "helped to consolidate transsexual subjectivity around the demand for surgery" (Hausman, 1992, p.277).

Even though transsexuality has now become established within medical research and practice, specialist clinics have been in operation for some decades, and medical research on transsexuality is far from sparse, the stigma attached to transsexuality persists. Seton, writing from within the medical establishment, comments that transsexuals "are medical orphans, receive sub-standard medical care and have precious few doctors willing to serve as their advocates" (1991, p.53).

⁶ Pfäfflin (1997) reports that Magnus Hirschfeld coined the term “transvestism” in 1910, and “transsexualism” in 1923. Also, in 1918, Hirschfeld reported that the first sex reassignment surgery took place in Berlin in 1912.

According to Stone's (1991) descriptions of U.S. "treatments" of transsexuality, some gender dysphoria clinics had, in past decades, been available to perform SRS on anyone who wanted it. This meant that the term "transsexual" could merely apply to anyone who was willing to sign on the dotted line. Clearly, from professional and academic points of view, this was not a satisfactory situation. Research into diagnostic criteria was subsequently carried out, but "even after considerable research, no simple and unambiguous test for gender dysphoria syndrome could be developed" (Stone, 1991, p.290). Some clinics, such as the Stanford clinic, chose applicants for surgery partly on the basis of their ability to perform convincingly the gender of their choice, and grooming and deportment clinics were established to teach transsexuals how to do this.

The American Psychiatric Association first recognised "transsexualism" officially as a disorder in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual for Mental Disorders published in 1980 (DSM III). At that time some of the most definitive psycho-medical works on transsexuality drew information from small, highly atypical samples of transsexuals (such as those with serious physical health problems, those working in the sex industry, those in prisons, or those with multiple psychiatric diagnoses) and therefore came to rather negative conclusions about the psychological status and lifestyles of transsexuals (Stone, 1991). Around the same time the strongest feminist voice on the topic of transsexuality was that of Janice Raymond who, focusing on male-to-female (MTF) transsexuality, described transsexuals as men who invade women's spaces by appropriating women's bodies (1979, p.99). This radical feminist claim continued to be "the definitive statement on transsexualism by a genetic female academic" (Stone, 1991, p.283) for over ten years. Although this claim has now been dislodged within academic studies of transsexuality (with rare exceptions such as Jeffreys, 1997), the sentiment behind it appears to linger within the popular lesbian feminist imagination; or so it would seem from the experiences of MTF transsexuals who have attempted to identify as lesbian and socialise within local lesbian communities.⁷

⁷ Within a year of my embarking on the current research, two local lesbian/feminist magazines published an article titled: "When is a Lesbian Not a lesbian?" (Otautahi Lesbian Outpost, 1995; Broadsheet, 1995; see Quinton, 1995). This article expressed the anti-transsexual sentiments that permeate aspects of lesbian communities within Aotearoa / New Zealand,

The latter half of the 20th Century has seen numerous autobiographical works which explore the journeys of (primarily) MTF transsexuals writing from essentialist positions, depicting the transition from male to female as absolute, and failing / refusing to explore possible mid-points (Bates, 1997). Although more complex autobiographical stories have emerged more recently, these pre-1980 accounts tend to reflect uncritically the “gender roles” of the time and therefore stand to be viewed with suspicion by feminist, queer, and psycho-medical researchers alike.⁸

The relationship between cross-gendered ways of being and psycho-medical models provides interesting terrain for studying the workings of psycho-medical institutions. It is the work of such institutions to construct meanings around mental health and illness. Through this process of meaning construction, psycho-medical institutions necessarily become implicated in the power / knowledge dynamics with which transsexuals struggle. For transsexuals, forging transsexual subjectivities has been a long process of negotiation with psycho-medical definitions of transsexuality and with dominant discourses on sex / gender. Having been cast within an illness model (and having reaped some benefits from that in terms of access to surgery and hormones), many transsexuals now struggle against the stigma associated with this model. Bolin notes

making it very difficult for MTF lesbians to find acceptance at bisexual and lesbian women’s venues and events. In a sense, this is comparable with the battles faced by MTF’s who have tried to attend the Michigan Women’s Music Festival; the lesbian / feminist politics of exclusion are the same. Yet in Aotearoa / New Zealand, unlike in Michigan, the number of MTF’s seeking entry to such lesbian-only or women-only spaces is miniscule, leaving individuals very little chance of rallying together for support, or of organising their own alternative venues and events.

⁸ Morris (1974) is an often-cited example of the style of transsexual autobiography which refuses to problematise “gender”. More recent trans-writings, such as Bornstein (1995) and Feinberg (1993) have included autobiographical aspects without employing a classic autobiographical style. These later works explicitly challenge the gender-normativity of earlier transsexual autobiographies.

the paradox inherent in the association between transsexuality and mental illness. She points out that "concepts of mental illness are actually rooted in the sociocultural matrix" and that matrix deems certain people to be "sick" which, in turn, means illnesses must effectively be "found" for them (Bolin, 1988, p.53).

Mental and medical health professionals "provide ... validation for the [MTF] transsexual's pursuit of womanhood. They legitimize the societally held beliefs that people who are women should have vaginas" (Bolin, 1988, p.54). In providing the very legitimization transsexuals seek, these health workers draw transsexuals into the power / knowledge dynamic through which transsexuality is constructed as an illness. In this process, the possibility of forging alternative transsexual subjectivities - ways of being transsexual without understanding oneself as "mentally disordered" - may be jeopardised. On the one hand, the mental health validation of transsexuals' experience as "real" and "treatable" may be empowering to transsexuals, but on the other hand psychiatrists may be understood to have merely "enhanced their own credibility at the expense of stigmatizing their clients as mentally ill" (Bolin, 1988, p.54). By declaring transsexuality as a medical problem, medical professionals justify their own involvement with this stigmatised group of individuals, and also create a power imbalance between themselves and transsexuals (Bolin, 1988).

The idea that transsexuality is a discrete and bounded phenomenon, defined by the sense of being "trapped in the wrong body", permeates psycho-medical, sexological, sociological, and anthropological literatures. Even in the late 1980's, works that were sympathetic to transsexuals, such as that of Anne Bolin, drew on this understanding of transsexuality. Bolin writes: "It is the transsexual's feeling that she is a female trapped in a male body who cannot continue to live as a man that distinguishes the transsexual from the transvestite" (Bolin, 1988, p.13). Transgenderists' challenges during the 1990's have brought attention to the perils of this construction of transsexuality. However, it has been important, in terms of the historical development of transsexuality, to use specific criteria to distinguish transsexuality from other non-normative "gender" phenomena. This has been important for the recognition of transsexuals' requests for surgery and hormones, and for enabling psycho-medical professionals to justify their response to these requests.

Harry Benjamin, an American endocrinologist, became a prominent advocate of sex reassignment surgery. It was he who referred to the "disorder" under the term "transsexualism", and developed further subcategories which were assigned to transsexuals according to the urgency of their demand for surgery (Benjamin, 1966). In the 1970's, the diagnostic label "gender dysphoria" began to replace "transsexualism". Although gender dysphoria is broader in definition than transsexualism, it still rested heavily on the wish for sex reassignment surgery (Hausman, 1992). The way psycho-medical professionals have framed definitions of transsexuality, often hinging these definitions on the quest for surgery, has been critiqued by numerous authors.

Rosario (1996) expresses concern about the dependence of the DSM IV (1994) diagnostic criteria for Gender Identity Disorder on surgical and other medical procedures relating to "sex-change". He suggests that transsexuals' demands for surgery should not be a basis for clinical judgment. To illustrate his critique he draws an analogy between transsexuality and appendicitis, writing that "[i]t is as if 'appendicitis' could be diagnosed only if lower right abdominal pain were accompanied by the patient's insistent demand to have an appendectomy" (p.37). Judith Shapiro (1991) also draws a striking analogy in her critique of SRS. She frames her concerns about the surgical approach to transsexuality in terms of the relationship between bodies and socio-political categories, writing that "[t]hough the analogy cannot be pushed too far, addressing gender issues through sex change surgery is a bit like turning to dermatologists to solve the race problem" (p.262). According to Billings and Urban (1982), the demand for surgery has been constructed as central to the disorder as a way of justifying the use of surgery to medical professionals who are opposed to it. Hausman elaborates on this, writing: "Billings and Urban are correct to note that many doctors have claimed merely to be responding to their patients' requests and have not recognised their involvement in the construction of a transsexual subjectivity that is founded (at least in part) in a symptomatology produced through the doctor-patient relationship" (1992, pp.281-282). Hausman is critical of the way the relationship between transsexuals' demands for surgery and the development of technologies that make such surgery possible often appear to be overlooked by

medical discourses. Such critiques of psycho-medical approaches to transsexuality form a fertile ground for the growth of transgender theorising.

Sandy Stone, a pioneer in the field of transgender theorising, is one of the transgenderists whose work will be discussed in this thesis. Stone challenges psycho-medical and popular conceptions of transsexuality, suggesting that instead of viewing transsexuality as a third gender, we might view it as a "genre" - a set of embodied texts whose potential for *productive* disruption of structured sexualities and spectra of desire has yet to be explored" (1991, p.296). According to Stone, bringing about such disruption means gaining active support from transsexuals who have become invisible through the construction of "plausible histories", i.e., through "passing" successfully. It is also necessary to examine and challenge the language around transsexuality, such as "being trapped in the wrong body", and develop a language which has room for "ambiguities and polyvocalities". For Stone, to forego passing means to allow oneself to be read, to read oneself aloud, and thus "to *write oneself* into the discourses by which one has been written" (1991, p.299). Stone calls this process of coming out "posttranssexuality". Here, posttranssexuality represents the challenge of the nineties; a challenge presented by transsexuals striving to forge healthy and empowering transsexual subjectivities in the face of psycho-medical institutions which persist in constructing transsexuality through models of disorder and dysfunction.

Where To From Here?

What are the issues for transsexual and transgender people in the late 1990's? How are these issues being discussed within academia? How might transgender theorising inform, and be informed by, various aspects of academic discussion? What arguments run through transgender theorising as it stands, and how do these relate to arguments being articulated through queer theories? In the process of discussing these questions, I draw a distinction between the practice of *theorising transsexuality*, which has been taking place through psycho-medical, sociological, and anthropological literatures since the late 1940's, and more recent *transgender theorising*, associated with the

contemporary politics of transgenderism. Through the theorising of transsexuality, gender normativity is maintained and the possibility of transgender existence is discussed in terms of pathology. Through transgender theorising, assumptions about gender normativity as the only *natural* and *healthy* possibility are brought into question. The suggestion that transsexuality could constitute a psychiatric disorder is strongly opposed. But do transgender theories actually rework the conceptual frame within which “gender” operates, or do they simply offer challenges to more superficial questions about how “gender” may be expressed?

This thesis consists of twelve chapters which are grouped into six parts. In Part One I introduce the thesis and situate my approach relative to various other literatures on transsexuality. Part Two offers a discussion of epistemological and methodological questions, and discusses the strategies used in my explanation of the discourses employed by transsexual and transgendered people in Aotearoa / New Zealand. Parts Three, Four, and Five constitute the main body of the thesis. Part Three focuses on critiques of psycho-medical constructions of transsexuality. Part Four explores discussions and debates occurring within transgenderism. Part Five maps out aspects of the relationship between transgenderism and queer theorising. Finally, Part Six critiques the relationship between academia and transgenderism which is played out through the theoretical and political manoeuvres discussed in the preceding three parts.

Psycho-Medical Constructions of Transsexuality

Psycho-medical texts develop a picture of what transsexuality is, based uncritically on normative assumptions about “gender” and “sexuality”. Thus, in Part Three, I discuss critically how psycho-medical approaches to transsexuality reinforce hegemonic expectations about the relationship between sexual anatomy and lived gender. The persistence of this uncritical approach to transsexuality closes doors on the possibility of affirming diversity. Thus, the psycho-medical institution, for many transsexuals, represents an oppressive force to be challenged and/or manipulated but not to be relied

upon for support. This appears contrary to the outward motivation of psycho-medical practice: to reduce human suffering.

Chronologically, the first formal attempts to theorise (and ontologise) transsexuality can be found within sexological, medical and psychological writings. Originally, sexological writings did not distinguish clearly between non-normative sexualities (homosexuality) and non-normative “genders” (transsexuality). I argue that contemporary psycho-medical writings, however, work from quite specific (and dubious) assumptions about sexuality and “gender”. In Chapter Five I discuss how current psycho-medical research, diagnostic criteria and clinical practice imposes on “transsexuals” hegemonic assumptions about the relationship between sexual attraction and lived gender. The effects of these assumptions potentially prevent some transsexuals from accessing appropriate psycho-medical services and result in some children being subjected to highly questionable clinical practices in the name of “preventing transsexuality”.

One very salient and persistent way that transsexuality has been constructed by psycho-medical and transsexual writings alike is as a case of being “trapped in the wrong body”. This construction of transsexuality simultaneously enables psycho-medical professionals to justify SRS and enables transsexuals to lobby for access to SRS. However, in Chapter Six, I argue that working within the “wrong-body” discourse restricts our ability to think critically about the relationship among sexual anatomy, lived gender, and embodiment. Contemporary transgender writings are developing more complex and insightful ways of articulating the relationship between the diverse range of gendered ways of being and the spectrum of sexual bodily forms. I suggest that such theorising may be useful in so far as it is not swept away in a postmodern fantasy of mix-and-match body parts. Such a fantasy ignores the material realities of many transsexual people who face the risks of violence, discrimination, poverty, depression and suicide because they feel unable to live within a “gender” that is “consistent” with the “sex” their bodies appear to be.

Transgender Dialogues

Transgenderism, as political activism and as academic theorising, challenges psycho-medical constructions of transsexuality and hegemonic assumptions about “gender”. In Part Four I argue that in order for transgender theorising to “work”, there needs to be careful attention to the question of gender-certainty and sensitive ways of responding to diversity within trans communities.

The simplicity of psycho-medical models where gender is knowable and certain may be contrasted with the complexity of a psychoanalytic approach which problematises the notion of gender. In some respects, insights of such an approach could be useful for transgender theorising, yet transgenderists tend either to ignore psychoanalytic theory or to perceive it as necessarily hostile to transgenderism. In Chapter Seven I suggest that psychoanalytic theorising need not be regarded simply as hostile, but may provide inspiration for the more complex theorising of “gender” that is sorely needed to make sense of transsexuality without reducing it to a case of being “trapped in the wrong body”, or subscribing to the uncritical pluralism suggested by a mix-and-match approach to bodies and gendered ways of being.

Transgenderism grapples primarily with challenging psycho-medical constructions of transsexuality as pathological, and with the related social and legal difficulties faced by transsexuals. However, transgenderism must also deal with struggles which occur within trans “communities”. In Chapter Eight I discuss one of the most salient of these struggles which I describe as the either/or versus both/neither debate. In an attempt to distance themselves from hegemonic understandings of “gender”, some transgenderists take up a political stance of refusing to identify (and live) as either “a man” or “a woman”. While this stance may be highly effective in terms of presenting a radical challenge and raising the visibility of transgenderism, it also alienates many transsexuals who wish for nothing more than to pass successfully and live quietly as “the (wo)man next door”.

Transgenderism attempts to draw its critique of the gender binary from cross-cultural sources, (re)claiming gender liminal people from various indigenous cultures as falling

under the transgender umbrella. However, in Chapter Nine I argue that current transgender theorising may fail to acknowledge its own ethnocentrism, thus potentially alienating some of the gender-crossing people who are supposedly encompassed within the transgender spectrum.

Queer / Trans Connections

“Queer Theory” represents academia’s most recent attempt at theorising non-normative sexualities and genders, with particular focus on poststructuralist perspectives on the politics and “identities” of gaylesbitrans⁹ people. In Part Five I argue that queer theorising offers potentially useful arguments for transgenderism, but is often couched in terms that fail to acknowledge transgender agendas.

Queer and transgender theorising and politics have various agendas and understandings in common. In Chapter Ten I discuss how they overlap with one another in so far as “queer” is understood to encompass gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender political interests. Some of the perspectives of queer theorising may (and indeed do) inform transgender theorising, however, in many instances “queer” does not serve transgender agendas well. I illustrate these limitations by showing how queer theorising and politics do not pay enough attention to gender, are often more concerned with simply promoting transgression than challenging oppressive structures on a material and practical level, and tend to prioritise gay and lesbian agendas over bisexual and transgender agendas.

Queer theorising overlooks transgender agendas in specific ways which hinder attempts at establishing coalitional politics around the term “queer”. Developing coalitional politics means various social change movements being aware of and respectful towards each others’ agendas, acknowledging and celebrating diversity, and

⁹I find this useful as a shorthand term for “gay, lesbian, bisexual, transsexual, and transgender”, however I only use it in the broadest sense as it ultimately threatens to reinforce the problematic notion of a simple all-inclusive queer alliance.

challenging the exclusions that exist within any one political / identity “community”. Such politics can draw on poststructuralist understandings regarding the constitution of social categories and hegemonic assumptions. Thus, each political challenge may be directed, not simply at “seeking acceptance,” but at changing assumptions about available ways of being. In Chapter Eleven I discuss how “outlaw theorising” may provide a means of reworking norms, and challenging ontological assumptions about sexuality and gender (O’Driscoll, 1996).

Academic Concerns

Academic approaches to transsexuality have sought variously to pathologise, diagnose, define, understand, or politicise transsexuality. In the process, most academic approaches to transsexuality work from uncritical ontological assumptions about transsexuality and position transsexual people as “other”. As transgender theorists become more vocal within academia, this situation has the potential to change. However, in Chapter Twelve I ask whether this means institutionalising transgenderism, or whether transgender theorising can work within academia while simultaneously being critical of the exclusions enacted through academic articulations of transgender politics.

CHAPTER TWO: SITUATING THE THESIS

The notion of “transsexuality” and the figure of “the transsexual” have been taken up within academic writings in numerous ways in the latter half of the twentieth century.¹⁰ There is no **one** “transsexuality” to be written about. Any attempt to write about transsexuality necessarily involves investment in aspects of the rapidly-moving politics that surround the question of what constitutes transsexuality and how it is to be “understood”. Therefore, in order for any writing about transsexuality to make sense, that writing must be situated clearly with respect to various politicised “knowledges” about transsexuality. That writing must specify its relationship to other writings on transsexuality.

Writings on Transsexuality

In this chapter I situate the thesis, first in the context of other writings about transsexuality, and then in the context of the theoretical framework within which it operates. I consider, from chronological and political perspectives, texts whose constructions of transsexuality enable this thesis to make sense. Although many of these texts are cited infrequently throughout the thesis, their constructions of transsexuality often constitute the *raison d'être* of the transgender politics which are central to this thesis. Because my purpose in this chapter is to *situate my thesis* in the context of various literatures, rather than to provide an extensive literature review, I find it useful to group the literatures discussed loosely under the following terms: clinical studies, sociological / anthropological studies, studies which appropriate the

¹⁰ Aspects of transsexuality have been written about extensively within the medical (particularly surgical and psychiatric) literatures through which contemporary notions of transsexuality have been forged. Transsexuality has also been studied variously by sociologists, anthropologists and psychologists. Transsexuality has been written about in the context of (auto)biographical works, and various feminist, queer and transgender writings.

transsexual figure for (non-transgender) political ends, critical and trans-disciplinary writings on the discursive constitution of transsexuality, and transgender writings.

Clinical studies attempt to understand transsexuality from the point of view of aetiology and symptoms for the purpose of diagnosis and treatment (e.g., Benjamin, 1966; Money, 1975; Stoller, 1968; Pauly, 1974; Coleman, Bockting and Gooren, 1993; Zucker and Bradley, 1995; Blanchard, Clemmensen and Steiner, 1987; Steiner, 1985). I draw on clinical texts (particularly in Part Three) for the purpose of critiquing their unacknowledged ontological assumptions and their theoretical frameworks.

Sociological / anthropological studies seek to make sense of transsexuality as part of the social system of "gender" (e.g., Garfinkel, 1967; Kessler and McKenna, 1978; Bolin, 1988). Some sociological / anthropological texts on transsexuality attempt to critique monocultural approaches to "gender" research, and to explicitly attempt a reading of transsexuality that is not offensive to transsexuals themselves (Bolin, 1988; Devor, 1997). By facilitating awareness of the political and theoretical issues at stake in talking about "gender" this genre of research provides, historically speaking, a foundation upon which critical studies of transsexuality are now able to build.

Some explicitly politically motivated studies appropriate the figure of the transsexual for political ends that may not be sought by transsexuals themselves (e.g., Raymond, 1979; Jeffreys, 1997; and, arguably, Butler, 1993). Explicitly politically motivated texts - whether decrying or exalting transsexuality - most obviously provide the ground-work which has enabled the current thesis. Feminist texts have provided me with critical understandings of the workings of political movements and theoretical discussions of "gender". Gay/lesbian/bisexual texts have been the sources of my understanding of identity politics. The way in which "the transsexual" is appropriated for political movements in which s/he may have no stake has heightened my awareness of the risks of assuming that "minority groups" might work well together for political ends.

Critical and trans-disciplinary writings on transsexuality / transgenderism are emerging in the 1990's and provide inspiration for the current study. These writings exist on the

boundaries of the above described fields and are concerned with how transsexuality is discursively constituted through the interplay of texts produced within those fields (e.g., Hausman, 1995; Namaste, 1996; Prosser, 1998). Such works could potentially provide bases for interdisciplinary, politically and theoretically important discussions of transsexuality. For this to occur, there needs to be more working across borders, more disruption of the political / academic division, and greater validation for marginal courses of study such as queer studies, feminist studies, and transgender studies. One of the barriers to such interdisciplinary discussion (a barrier with which I struggle explicitly through this thesis) is the difficulty of bringing together, and working simultaneously with, very different languages and political agendas (psycho-medical, psychoanalytic, queer, poststructuralist feminist, transgender etc.). Nevertheless, such barriers do not detract from the importance of creating the common languages and political / academic fora necessary for discussing these divergent agendas.

Writings generated by transsexual and transgendered people themselves are a key source for the current work (e.g., Stone, 1991; Feinberg, 1996; Bornstein, 1995; Stryker, 1994; MacKenzie, 1994). I have taken the lead from these writings in developing a critique of other texts on transsexuality, while attempting simultaneously to identify theoretical and political problem-areas in transgender writings themselves.

Clearly this is not intended as an exhaustive list of the kinds of texts which contribute to the discursive shaping of transsexuality. I have not mentioned the roles played by (auto)biographical works, journalistic writings, the extensive range of interactive texts produced by and for transsexuals on the internet, the ever-increasing array of documentaries and chat-shows dedicated to discussing transsexuality, or the persistent interest in transsexual themes within works of fiction.¹¹ Nevertheless, the genres of

¹¹ For example, New Zealand-produced television items that screened while this research was in progress include a documentary on fa'afafine and an interview with Georgina Beyer, a mayor who achieved celebrity status due to her transsexuality. Christchurch's principal newspaper published a story, titled "I am living proof of the third sex", about a British transgender person (Stuart, 1992). Recent films and novels which portray transsexual or transgendered people as fictional characters include *The Crying Game*, *Silence of the Lambs*,

literature mentioned above form the epistemological context within which are debated the political issues central to this thesis: What is at stake for transsexuals in the constitution of transsexuality through clinical literatures (Part Three)? What ontological assumptions about transsexuality underpin debates within transgender political movements (Part Four)? What are the benefits and disadvantages of reading transsexuality through queer theorising (Part Five)?

Studies on Transsexuality

Because of the rapid changes in the discursive constitution of transsexuality in recent decades, and particularly because of the explosion of queer and transgender texts in the 1990s, it is impossible to draw very close parallels between this research (conducted in the mid-to-late 1990s) and research conducted in former decades. Nevertheless, I wish to acknowledge specific studies, from the 1960s to the 1980s, which have made the current research possible.

In 1967, Garfinkel published his ethnomethodological research on the now-famous case of Agnes. Central to Garfinkel's theorising of Agnes' transsexuality was his critical discussion of the "natural attitude" towards gender.¹² Eleven years later,

and Feinberg's *Stone Butch Blues*. Biographies of transsexual and transgender people include Denise Tilling's *To Thine Own Self Be True* (1997), Jan Morris' *Conundrum* (1974), and Carmen's biography (Martin, 1988).

¹²The "natural attitude," as described by Garfinkel (1967, pp.122-128), consists of the following points: there are only two genders; one's gender is invariant; any exceptions to two genders are not to be taken seriously (i.e. they may be understood in terms of pathology, or a joke); genitals are the essential sign of gender; there are no transfers from one gender to the other except for ceremonial purposes (i.e. masquerade); there are no cases where gender is not attributed: everyone must be assigned to one gender or the other; the male / female dichotomy is a "natural" one which exists quite independently of scientists' or anyone else's criteria for being male or female; and membership in one gender or the other is "natural": being male or female is not dependent upon anyone deciding which you are.

Kessler and McKenna, also working within an ethnomethodological framework, published their research on gender construction and "transsexualism," reviewing and interrogating Garfinkel's earlier critique of the natural attitude toward gender. Kessler and McKenna's work stands out from most other 1960's and 1970's writings on transsexuality in that their approach asks what transsexuality can teach us about "the social construction of gender by all persons" (1978, p.112), rather than considering transsexuality in terms of deviance or disorder, aetiology and treatment. An important aspect of this study involves demonstrating how transsexuality can be used to reinforce normative assumptions about gender (i.e. the natural attitude), rather than necessarily presenting a challenge to those assumptions.

Although Kessler and McKenna's work was revolutionary for its time, there are inevitably a number of ways in which current research on transsexuality brings into question its once-radical findings and assumptions. For instance, Kessler and McKenna write that: "[t]ranssexuals take their own gender for granted", and "transsexuals' construction of gender is self-conscious. They make obvious what non-transsexuals do 'naturally'" (p.114). Neither of these observations is consistent with the way transsexual participants in the current study talked about their relationship to "gender". This could be as much an effect of differences across transsexual interviewees as an outcome of the researchers' analyses.

Kessler and McKenna write about the ways transsexual people maintain, through their language, the "rules" of gender. For example, the MTF transsexuals involved in Kessler and McKenna's study allegedly talk about altering their facial hair growth pattern rather than removing a beard, the implication being: *since I have always been a woman really, I never had a beard, just excessive facial hair*. Another instance of this kind of languaging relates to surgery. Here the implication is that (for FTMs) the penis was there before or at least should have been there, so what is needed is not *sex change surgery* but *reconstructive surgery*. Whilst I am aware of this kind of language being used, sometimes by transsexual people, I have come to see this as being used purposely and strategically in certain situations, rather than as an expression of the transsexual person's personal beliefs about "gender". I regard it as something that

Transsexuality isn't about gender, but about bodies/sexed identity.
 Roen makes the assumption that sex + gender are connected.
 TS v. TG are different.

some transsexual people do in some situations for the sake of survival, and particularly in medical settings where important decisions are made for them on the basis of their careful presentation of their attitude toward "gender".

The current study is similar to Kessler and McKenna's study in so far as it works from interview material with transsexuals, and approaches transcripts with a critical awareness of language and a readiness to critique medical treatment of transsexuality. Their study differs from mine in that it is located in North America of the late 1970's and therefore cannot be informed by the current politics of transgenderism, or the poststructuralist challenges to "gender" made in recent years through both feminist and queer theorising.

Billings and Urban's (1982) study of transsexuality appears to work from similar principles to my own: refuting biologically essentialist claims and attempting to find ways of understanding transsexuality that may be productive for transsexuals themselves. Their focus is on the construction of transsexuality through medical discourses overlaps most clearly with my critique of psycho-medical discourses in Part Three.

Billings and Urban approach both sexuality and gender with a critical eye, arguing that "the stress by 'phallogentric medicine' ... on the presence or absence of a penis as the definitive insignia of gender challenges the politics of the women's movement and the intellectual thrust of the behavioural sciences, which assert that anatomy need not define destiny" (1982, p.266). These authors write that transsexuality is created, maintained, and marketed by the medical institution, resulting in the transsexual identity, which is applied to a range of "sexual deviants and victims of severe gender role distress" (p.266).

Like Kessler and McKenna, Billings and Urban's approach seems similar to mine but they necessarily lack the input of transgender and queer writings which appeared after the publication of their paper.

Bolin (1988) writes about transsexuality from an anthropological perspective, focusing on the process of *becoming* transsexual, in terms of the way the transsexual person him/herself identifies. Like me, Bolin works towards a trans-friendly reading of transsexuality and approaches the medical treatment of transsexuality critically. However, she understands the role of physicians in anthropological terms (through the metaphor of “shaman”) whereas I critique the power relationships between physician and transsexual through a Foucauldian understanding of the knowledge / power dynamic. Furthermore, Bolin’s work might be distinguished from mine in that she appears to work uncritically with concepts of “gender” and “identity”.

The current research has not only been enabled by pioneering social science researchers of transsexuality. It also rests on contemporary poststructuralist critiques, and critical understandings of language, subjectivity and knowledge. The theoretical frameworks within which this thesis works facilitate my engagement with a lively multivocal discussion of transgender issues. Working from feminist poststructuralist understandings of politics and “knowledge”, enables various (often marginalised) perspectives on transsexuality to be articulated through this thesis. How the thesis is situated with respect to the multiple “voices” of transsexuality / transgenderism can be understood through a poststructuralist critique of language and subjectivity.

Theoretical Frameworks

Language and Subjectivity

Positivist approaches to “studying transsexuality” assume that language is merely a vehicle for transmitting meaning. Therefore, attempts at theorising transsexuality may take the form of a series of texts, each representing “progress” towards exposing the “reality” about transsexuality. Such texts are unlikely to be critical of their own language. In this thesis I work from the assumption that language is not transparent. The stories told about transsexuality - whether those stories are found in academic texts or the interview transcripts - do not simply provide truths about transsexuality.

To make sense of the way I write about transsexuality it is necessary to begin talking about language and how meanings of transsexuality may be forged.

Barthes (1986) describes how the “reality effect” may be produced when the narrative structure is used. That is, by telling our stories without interrogating the language we use, or without being critical of the very processes through which language operates, we produce *meaning* but treat it as “truth”. Minh-ha (1989) is similarly critical of stories that are held up as “truth”. She writes about the way we come into being through the stories that are passed down from one generation to the next, emphasising that those stories are never fixed but shift and grow as we do, accumulating new shades of meaning with each retelling. Working from Minh-ha’s suggestion that our stories precede us enables a certain kind of reading of interview transcripts in this thesis. This reading may heighten our awareness of the situational and relational nature of transsexual / transgender stories. Minh-ha also explores the possibility of collective identity, writing: “In this chain and continuum, I am but one link. The story is me, neither me nor mine” (1989, p.122). Minh-ha suggests that “we are in terror of letting ourselves be engulfed by the depths of muteness” (p.123) and this is why we repeat and recreate, “doing violence to words” in order to fashion ourselves and our stories in ways that make sense. It is not simply a matter of telling the truth, for truth “does not make sense; it exceeds meaning and exceeds measure” (p.123). Through repetition / recreation the story changes, as all things must in order to live. By reading transsexual / transgender stories with an awareness of fluidity, we may be reminded that alternative storylines are always available. Transsexual / transgendered people whose words are included in this thesis strategically insert themselves into certain stories at certain times. In terms of analysing their stories, that they choose one story over another, and how they alternate between stories, is more important than trying to assert the “truth” of any particular story.

If each of us has a story that can be told and retold but, because of the inevitable limitations of language, can never express the entirety of ourselves, then think how much or little it might mean to include in one’s story the statement: “I am transsexual”. For this to even begin to make sense, there needs to be a context: we

need to think not only of language, but to have a critical awareness of discourse. We need to attend to the ideologically invested ways in which language is used.

Working from a critical approach to language opens up questions about the relationship between language, subjectivity, power and agency. Here I employ a Foucauldian approach to considering the way transsexuals' subjectivities are discursively constituted and the way transgenderists acquire agency through taking up positions in discourse. Foucault (1978) describes the subject as constituted by surrounding discourses, but also as an agent in participating in or resisting those discourses. Thus, there is an element of choice (which discourses to resist and which to support) as well as an element of the choice having already been made (historical processes that have resulted in certain discourses, certain identities, and certain possibilities of subjecthood being available) (Sawicki, 1991).

The implications of this are particularly salient for the discussion in Part Three. Here, describing transsexuality as a subject to be studied, or describing transsexuals in terms of diagnostic categories, gives us clues about the power dynamics at play. Evoking Foucault, Gunew writes that power "is not conceived in any monolithic or centralized way and is not, in other words, simply a matter of 'us versus them', ... Power is reproduced in discursive networks at every point where someone who 'knows' is instructing someone who doesn't 'know'" (1990, p.22). Working with a critical awareness of the relationship between language and power encourages us to ask *who* is doing the speaking and *whom* is being spoken about when psycho-medical discourses are employed for the purpose of understanding transsexuality.

Foucault (1978) also demonstrates the importance of understanding sexuality as discursively constructed for the purpose of mapping the ways power operates in the constitution of the sexed subject. Studying the way language is deployed to "make sense" of sexuality provides insights into the power / knowledge dynamics at play in the discursive construction of transsexuality.

Sexuality and Power/Knowledge

In *History of Sexuality* Foucault explains how, with sexological “knowledge”, came the development of normative sexuality and the subsequent evolution of sexual categories which were defined - in medical, legal, psychiatric, and sociological terms - as deviant. Behaviours were coded “sexual”, recorded and quantified, then those behaviours were attached to - embedded into - the identities of the individuals who performed them. These quantified behaviours and the prevalence of individuals bearing the consequent labels became the object of scientific inquiry and thus came to bear the weight of scientific knowledge and the status of truth (Foucault, 1978).

According to Foucault, power operates through knowledges found in writing, professional organisations, and social relationships; thus discourse is contained in institutions and words. Discursive fields influence one another and appeal to each other's "truths" for authority. These truths are seen as unalterable by humans and discoverable through scientific inquiry. Biological theories about sexual difference are an example of such truths, which are seen as representing objective knowledge and thus serve a powerful legitimating function (Scott, 1990). Sexology, the area of scientific research specifically focused on sexuality, has come under considerable criticism for its uncritical use of hegemonic understandings of “gender”.

One critic of sexological studies, Irvine, writes: “In response to shifts in traditional gender roles throughout the century, sexologists have viewed scientific research as an avenue to the ‘truth’ about gender differences and similarities. In its clinical application, gender research is an attempt to shape cultural constructions of gender in the mold of scientific fact” (1990, p. 229). The epitome of this attempt to mould “scientific fact” out of “cultural constructions of gender” can be seen in psycho-medical responses to transsexuality. Here the client, in order to convince the clinician of his / her transsexuality, is likely to be put through a series of tests where s/he must demonstrate that s/he is expressing the ‘truth’ about his / her gender identity, and that ‘truth’ must, of course, concur with the scientific understanding (and dominant cultural understandings) of gender in that particular place and time.

Fausto-Sterling's work explores the construction of gender, not only within sexology but more broadly across institutions. She writes about how legal systems have long dictated that everyone be categorised as either male or female in much of the Western world and the present century has seen the reinforcement of this categorising by the medical institution. Surgeons, among others, construct the male/female dichotomy as a reality through "the complete erasure of any form of embodied sex that does not conform to a male-female ... pattern" (1993, p.23). Fausto-Sterling goes on to observe that "[i]ronically, a more sophisticated knowledge of the complexity of sexual systems has led to the repression of such intricacy" (1993, p.23).

Therefore, with greater availability of body-altering technologies, not only is there more work being done to critique the implications of those bodily transformations, but there is also a greater amount of normalising surgery taking place. Transsexual SRS may be regarded as a part of this industry. Another example is provided by "treatments" of intersexuality; possibly more striking because of the fact that these surgical alterations take place without the consent of their recipients. (This is somewhat ironic in comparison with the administrative / diagnostic gauntlet that many transsexuals go through to access surgery).

As research on intersexuality came to be accompanied by greater technological advancement, scientific approaches to intersexuality tended more and more towards "correcting" the "problem" as soon as possible, i.e., creating an individual who fitted as closely as possible into the male/female dichotomy. This was particularly so in the post-World War Two era when there was great emphasis on gender roles and much invested in maintaining those roles as separate. During this time, scientific literature on intersexuality painted a bleak picture for intersexual people. One such text evokes "visions of a hopeless psychological misfit doomed to live always as a sexual freak in loneliness and frustration" (Fausto-Sterling, 1993, p.23). Yet empirical research on the lives of intersexuals does not support this view and in some cases contradicts it.

Kessler (1990) discusses the various ways in which medical responses to intersexuality in infants reveal attitudes towards gender and sexual anatomy. She identifies *lying* as an important aspect of gendering, in this context, reporting that "parents [of

intersexed infants] are asked [by medical professionals] to sidestep the infant's gender rather than admit that the gender is unknown, thereby collaborating in a web of white lies, ellipses, and mystifications" (1990, pp.14-15). Having based her research on interviews with medical professionals who work with intersexual infants and their parents, Kessler found that although "most of the physicians interviewed claimed that personal convictions of doctors ought to play no role in the decision-making process [about the infant's gender] ... In fact, doctors make decisions about gender on the basis of shared cultural values that are unstated, perhaps even unconscious, and therefore considered objective rather than subjective" (p.18). By reading this through a critical lens, it is possible to understand physicians' claims to objectivity as discursive manoeuvres designed to maintain the hegemonic approach to "gender" supported by the medical institution. Here, parents' apparent rights to "consent" to the surgical alteration of their intersexed children's genitalia may be understood as limited. Given the power / knowledge dynamic operating between these isolated (and possibly very anxious) parents and the medical institution (with its claims to "objective knowledge" about intersexuality), there may have been very little chance for them to do anything but consent to their children's sex-(re)assignment.

In Kessler's research, the relationship between language and institutional power was explicitly acknowledged through the course of action that was recommended by medical professionals. Once the question of gender assignment had been fully "resolved" in any particular case, Kessler found it was suggested that the parents of the intersexed child explain the situation to important others in their community. Money's argument for this course of action was that "medical terminology has a special layman's magic in such a context; it is final and authoritative and closes the issue" (Money, 1975 in Kessler, 1990, p.22). Thus, while making claims to objectivity, medical professionals were quite clearly aware of the power dynamics they were employing and the role of language in maintaining the power balance in their favour. The knowledge / power dynamic so clearly exposed in such studies of intersexuality impacts similarly upon constructions of transsexuality. The opportunity to access "sex change" technologies may depend upon one's ability to "fit" within certain medicalised notions of gender and of transsexuality. These notions are set up as "knowledges",

which provide the reference point and legitimation for the psychiatrists empowered to decide who may, and who may not, access sex reassignment technologies.

Deconstructionism as Political Strategy

Transsexual, transgender, and intersexual activists have rallied in response to the knowledge/power dynamic through which transsexuality has been defined as a medical / psychiatric issue. The politics of concern here relate to who gets to define "transsexuality" and how "gender" is understood (and subsequently policed). Transgender critiques of "gender" deploy deconstruction as a political strategy. Implicit in this strategy is, not only the deconstruction of gender and sexuality categories, but also the deconstruction of identity.

Deconstruction, as I write about it, is a process where: i) the structure of the gender binary is destabilised and the assumptions which underlie it are brought into question; ii) multiple possibilities for gendering are presented, with the implication that gendering can no longer be understood in an essentialist sense as fixed or discrete, but must be reconceptualised as an ongoing process; and iii) the process of gendering is demonstrated or argued to be ongoing for everyone (not just for those who do not "fit" into the traditional gender binary) and the meanings of traditional categories (man, woman) are conceptualised as constantly shifting and being reshaped.

This understanding of deconstruction is consistent with Grosz's interpretation of deconstruction as a process which occupies a space inside and outside of texts, and which uses a system's own weapons against itself (Grosz, 1990). According to her, deconstruction consists of: i) reversal of dichotomous terms; ii) displacement of a system in which dichotomous terms function; iii) creation of a "hinge" term (e.g.: Irigaray uses the concept of two lips and Kristeva refers to the "semiotic" in this way), which vacillates between the oppositional terms, thus rupturing the system in which it functions. This process aims to undo logocentrism and involves the development of new terms which are: "both preconditions of the oppositional structure and terms in excess of its logic" (Grosz, 1990, p.97).

Some transgendered people (such as Kate Bornstein, Leslie Feinberg, and Sandy Stone) have been articulating ideas about transgenderism which open the way to poststructuralist readings of transsexuality. These transsexuals' lives may be understood as acts of deconstruction in that they refuse to identify as either male or female, they are visibly, vocally, loudly transsexual, and they challenge other transsexuals to "come out" as trans, rather than "passing" as male or female. It is this appearance of political transsexual discourses to constitute an act of deconstruction which is explored most specifically in Part Four.

"Theory" and "Politics"

Theory often functions as the attempt to turn knowledge into a truth

(Gunew, 1990, p.16)

A theory that is politically useful may be either true or false: its political value does not depend upon its accuracy, but upon its power of persuasion or coercion.

(Norton, 1997, p.31)

Studies which take a critical approach to language and power enable one to be reflexively critical of the political implications of "theory". What counts as "theory"? What political agendas are served by academic studies which generate "theory"?

Writing about "transgender", "queer", and "feminist" theorising poses questions about how "theory" might be different when produced from the margins. Is it even desirable to counter hegemonic theorising with yet more "theory"? What are the implications of developing theory from the perspectives of identity groups?

Queer "theory" has evolved during the 1990's: sufficiently recently that it can only tentatively be regarded as a body of theorising. Indeed, for all the commotion caused

by queer academic writings, some authors are highly critical of giving that body of writing the designation “queer theory” (e.g., Berlant and Warner, 1995). Other authors are critical of queer theorising on the grounds that it obscures the differences among queer people, overlooking important political agendas. For example feminists have expressed concern that queer overlooks feminist concerns (Martin, 1994), issues of classism (Hennessy, 1995), and racism (Anzaldúa, 1991). Transgenderists are critical of queer writings that marginalise transgender concerns (Namaste, 1996; Prosser, 1998). And there is a general sense of disgruntlement at the tendency of queer writings to be held up as the latest trendy political moment, without contextualising these writings relative to the decades of political work through which they have been enabled (Danuta-Walters, 1996).

Queer texts that regard transsexuality as part of a spectrum of “queer” sexualities and genders often fail to address the intense conflicts that exist among these diverse social groups, such as transphobia¹³ within gay/lesbian circles, and homophobia among transsexuals. Many transsexuals do not want to have anything to do with the “queer” political and theoretical pronouncements that (sometimes) presume to represent them.

O’Driscoll (1996) suggests, instead of continuing to develop more bodies of “theory” around labels such as “lesbian”, “feminist”, “transgender”, and “queer”, that there be a more explicit attempt to develop “outlaw theory” as distinct from these identity-bounded bodies of theorising. Further discussion of the relationship among queer, transgender and outlaw theorising will take place in Part Five.

What are the political implications (for transsexuals) of what gets expressed as “theory” and which texts make their way into the hallowed territory of “academia”? What role do transgenderists’ writings play in the process of theory-production?

¹³ The term “transphobia” refers to “the stigmatization of transsexuals” (Prosser, 1998, p.8). Prosser acknowledges that it could also be interpreted literally to mean “the fear of the subject in transition” (p.8).

From reading the works of various transgender activists and theorists and then conducting the interviews and the workshop, I came to realise just how risky any attempt to characterise “transsexual” perspectives would be. Not only are queer texts and transsexual autobiographies¹⁴ obviously problematic, but the very works of transgenderists proclaiming to articulate a transsexual politics often seem to fall short of either representing the views of transsexuals broadly or presenting a workable political statement. In suggesting that the political statements made by transgenderists may not be “workable”, I am not criticising their utopian visions or their political sentiments but I am questioning their theoretical underpinnings.

How is it useful to exhort transsexuals to shatter the false (gender-)histories they have carefully constructed and live in an in-between state, without mentioning the various possible economic, cultural, religious and emotional reasons why this is simply not possible for most transsexuals? Is it useful to critique the construction of “man” and “woman” as social categories - as though these categories may be shed as soon as we realise that they are “just categories” - without addressing the implications of sexed embodiment? Is it useful to dismiss psychoanalytic theorising as hostile to transsexuals without engaging in some discussion, at least to demonstrate what aspects of psychoanalytic theorising about transsexuality are hostile and how? How is it useful to envisage a postmodern pastiche of body-parts as a radical transgendered statement, when a high proportion of transpeople will never be financially able to afford the surgery they so desperately seek?

One answer to these questions is that such politically radical (and theoretically dubious) statements are useful for bringing transsexual debates into a public forum. Such statements are useful as political rhetoric. This is all very well, and I appreciate it as a political move. But here I am interested in supporting and engaging with those discussions of transsexuality which are not just politically motivated rhetoric. In the

¹⁴ Transsexual autobiographies provide highly problematic representations of transsexual people in that they usually work very hard to obscure issues of diversity, uncertainty, and ambiguity among transsexuals. For this reason, I have not drawn primarily from autobiographical texts.

course of this thesis, I am interested in debating important issues for transsexual people in a forum where there is potential, not just for shock-value, but for discussion across disciplines: among academics and psycho-medical clinicians, among queer and transgender theorists, among activists and academics.¹⁵

¹⁵ The question of the relationship between the “political” and the “academic” will be discussed in Part Six.

PART TWO

CHAPTER THREE: EPISTEMOLOGY

"Knowing"

*The youngest person I interviewed ('Ami') was a post-operative MTF whose talk about her experiences of 'gender' resonates with epistemological issues at the heart of this research. Ami was not afraid to expose the contradictions she experienced: contradictions between what 'men' and 'women' are supposed to be, and her own gendered experiences. She was even willing to challenge understandings that operated among other transsexuals: understandings that suggested she should feel unwavering certainty in her decision to undergo SRS; that she should feel unconditionally that being a woman was going to be **right** for her for the rest of her life. Ami risked talking about her doubts and fears, about her feelings of ambivalence, and about her sense of being 'in-between'. She acknowledged that living as a woman was not simply about finding a 'true' identity that had formerly been hidden within the 'wrong body'. For her, being a woman was not about conforming to stereotypes of femininity, wearing certain clothes or engaging in particular gendered activities. Like the other transpeople I spoke with, Ami found it difficult to say just what it was about living as a woman that appealed to her so much that she was willing to face the enormous risks and costs of SRS and lifelong hormonal treatment. On finding it difficult to articulate the meaning of being gendered 'woman', she eventually resorted to saying 'it's really hard to define [but] for me ... it's just a knowing'.*

If, indeed, being a woman or a man is “just a knowing”; if, as the experiences of many transpeople suggest, being a woman or a man is never simply about anatomy, physique, speech, social behaviour, sexual attraction, clothing, preferred pastimes, chromosomes, endocrinology, movement and gesticulation, up-bringing or emotions, then we may well ask the following questions: What is this sense of “knowing”? How is what we “know” shaped? What does or does not count as a “knowing”? And how is some people’s “knowing” validated and others’ *invalidated*?

We may also ponder the relationship between my “knowing” and that of the interviewee(s). To what extent am I implicated in interviewees’ struggle to come to “know” themselves as wo/men? How does my reading of their text construct this knowing? How does my sense of myself as a woman (dis)qualify me for engaging in this research? What kind of critique of “knowledge” (and of the possibility of “knowing oneself as a wo/man”)¹⁶ must I develop in order to allow various interviewees’ articulations of knowing to speak to each other within the context of a doctoral thesis? How might my critique of such *knowing* undermine the bases for political identity for which some transsexuals have fought so hard?

We may also question the relationship between the interviewee’s “knowing” and that of other transsexuals. How can we understand some transsexuals’ “knowledge” of themselves as wo/men versus other transsexuals’ sense of themselves as in-between? To what extent does the “knowledge” of oneself as a wo/man constitute a political investment? And, if saying one is *really* a wo/man is reduced to a political strategy, does this elevate statements of being in-between to the status of *truth*? Or, to approach

¹⁶ I am using the term “wo/man” as a short-hand for “woman or man”. I also use this term to distinguish those transsexuals who seek to live within the positions of “woman” and “man” from those who live in transgendered positions. Therefore, I am **not** writing “wo/man” to signal an ambiguous gendered position, such as characterised by the expression “both/neither” in Chapter Eight. I am also using the term “wo/man” rather than “woman” specifically to remind the reader that many transsexuals strive to be **men**, and thereby to counter the numerous texts on transsexuality that privilege a MTF transition, barely acknowledging FTM possibilities.

the same question from a different angle, are there ever statements of *knowing* that do not operate as political manoeuvres?

Each of the following parts of this thesis analyses the political and discursive investments of particular statements of *knowing*. These statements acquire the status of *knowledge* through being articulated within certain discursive frameworks and institutional contexts, such as psycho-medical discourses, transgender activism, and queer theory. In this chapter, I foreground epistemological concerns which underpin the thesis, discussing how constructions of knowledge, identity and experience are worked together to enable the production of “knowledge” about transsexuality.

Producing “Knowledge” about Transsexuality

Some years ago, at a conference, I met a woman who reminded me immediately of someone else I knew, but I could not remember whom. I watched her for days noting which physical features, movements, gestures, ways of being were familiar, in my attempt to remember the woman she reminded me of. Finally I realised who it was and why it had been so hard to recall. She reminded me of a man: a middle aged man who is a friend of my parents. It seems that my gender-attribution process ruled out the possibility that she reminded of a man. *Knowing* that she was a woman had left me with a *certainty* that the person, of whom she so startlingly reminded me, would also be a woman.

In contrast to this, upon meeting some of the interviewees I was reminded of other people I had known and, in this instance, I had no trouble crossing gender boundaries to make the connections. Because I *knew* ahead of time the interviewees were not simply wo/men, I was less likely to see them as such. Yet, precisely because I knew in advance that the interviewees were neither simply men nor women, I found myself to be a poor judge of their ability to pass. Most of the interviewees described themselves as passing all or almost all of the time. Yet I found myself wondering if that could really be the case. Because I already knew they were transsexual / transgendered, I

found it hard to imagine how passers-by could see them unquestioningly as wo/men. Similarly, most of the interviewees themselves tended not to talk definitively about *knowing* themselves to be simply men or women. They were more likely to talk about knowing there was something wrong, knowing they were in-between, or knowing they were **not** wo/men. Similarly, my *knowing* about their gender transition affected my reading of their gendered appearance, whereas to an on-looker who had no reason to think otherwise they were presumably read as wo/men.

Most on-lookers operate from a hegemonic knowledge-frame where gender is concerned. Therefore, because of what they *know* (i.e., “this person can only be a man or a woman, and I will know which they are by observing obvious bodily features, dress and movements”) the average on-looker could read the interviewees unproblematically as wo/men. Whereas, my knowledge frame was different in that I *knew* these people had experienced living as someone differently gendered. Before I even met most of the interviewees, I knew whether they had had surgery and what pronouns or identity labels they used to describe themselves.

If the knowledge-frame we work with affects how we read others’ genders, so too does it affect how we read transsexuality. Because of the persistence of the binary gender model in both popular and scientific thought, transsexuality has often been conceived as somehow fitting within that dichotomous frame. For instance, MTF transsexuals have often been understood as *really* being males (who, due to psychological or hormonal disturbances, come to think of themselves as women), or as *really* being women (who were born in the wrong body). Both of these perspectives on transsexuality rest on the assumption that there is some gender-truth underlying the outward gender-confusion. Both of these perspectives allow no room for the existence of possibilities outside the man/woman binary. This is not because transsexuality per se fails to offer itself as an example of the possibility of being simultaneously not-man and not-woman. Indeed, it appears to be a striking example of that very possibility. Rather, that transsexuality has been conceived as a case of mistaken gender - a case that can be covered over by proclaiming what the person *really is* - attests to the persistence of the knowledge frame we call “gender”. “Gender” operates as a kind of truth; a truth that constricts how we come to “know” transsexuality.

In proposing to write about “transsexuality”, I am instantly evoking meanings (and knowledges) of which I am critical. Through this thesis, I explicitly critique psycho-medical approaches to transsexuality as attempts to pass off ideologically invested knowledges as “truth”. I am also critical of the assumption which pervades writing on transsexuality that “gender” can be “known”. Another implication of writing about “transsexuality” relates to language - not just the medico-scientific language from which the word originates - but English language. By using the word “transsexuality” in this thesis, I risk complicity with racially hegemonic understandings of “gender”. Surely if I want to challenge oppressive ways of conceptualising “gender”, then I am doing my project a disservice by speaking from within a language where masculine and feminine are so entrenched as binary opposites that even people who live, to all intents and purposes, outside of that binary are assumed to want to “trans” from one side to the other. Throughout my readings and interviews, numerous ways of sidestepping the word “transsexual” have presented themselves to me: fa’afafine, hijra, two-spirited, androgyn, whakawahine, fakaleiti. On the whole, these expressions were presented as ways that indigenous peoples referred to those who step outside of a two-gender system. These terms enable some gender liminal people to simultaneously reclaim their cultural heritage and attain the esteemed social position that may have been granted to gender liminal people in some cultures prior to colonisation. In a postcolonial context, these terms jostle against the words “transsexual”, “transgender”, and (sometimes) “gay”. As a result, aspects of transsexuality rub off, for instance, on fa’afafine identity. One of the realities of existing within multiply marginalised, doubly colonised communities is that the question of SRS has appeared in cultural contexts where it would once have been unthinkable.

In writing about “transsexuality”, I risk perpetuating the effects of colonisation: of reinforcing the power of English language to define people and to take primacy, even in cultural contexts where other languages (and “gender systems”) are being reclaimed. Nevertheless, I have chosen to foreground the term “transsexuality” *in order to critique* the epistemic assumptions upon which that term is founded; i.e., assumptions about the universality of the two-gender system and (as discussed in

chapter 9) racialised assumptions that sometimes creep into transgender political writings.

Knowledge about transsexuality has been produced through medical, psychological, and sexological research, through anthropological and sociological studies, through psychoanalytic theorising, through representations of transsexual people in popular media, as well as through transsexual people's own attempts to be heard through autobiography, political activism, theatre and the visual arts. Much of this knowledge production has rested on assumptions of *truth*, for example: that the true identity of a person may be found in her/his psyche, that one's true sex is determined by chromosomes, that a person's own *experience* gives us the truest account of who that person *is*, that one must necessarily *be* a "man" or a "woman".

Knowledge is constructed as discursive fields appeal to each other's "truths" for authority. According to positivist science, these truths are unalterable by humans and discoverable through scientific inquiry. Biological theories about sexual difference are an example of such truths, which are seen as representing objective knowledge and thus serve a powerful legitimating function (Scott, 1990). The various truth assumptions and personal (gendered) experiences of clinicians, researchers, writers, performers and activists form a(n often unacknowledged) base upon which *knowledge* about transsexuality is built. For transsexual and transgendered people, articulations of their gendered selves are necessarily founded on their "experiences", but what problems are there with the practice of founding *knowledge* on *experience*?

Knowledge and Experience

As I question truth-statements about (trans)gendered identities, I must also question the status of experience as basis for such truth-statements. Rather than taking transsexuals' talk about their (gendered) experiences at face value, I am interested in the discursive implications of how they articulate their experiences. I use Scott's (1992) reflections on "experience" to understand the discourses transsexual people use

to make sense of, or construct, their experiences of gender. Thus, it is not "individuals who have experience, but subjects who are constituted through experience. Experience in this definition then becomes not the origin of our explanation ... but rather that which we seek to explain, that about which knowledge is produced" (Scott, 1992, pp.25-26).

Scott (1992) argues that documenting experience as a means of providing authoritative and legitimate information about people's lives, is both successful and limiting to those whose research focuses on issues of difference. This practice ensures that what is written remains within an orthodox frame, each new piece of information being allowed to question what has gone before, but not questioning the basic assumptions and practices. Thus, the identities of those whose experience is documented as "different" are not questioned and therefore, the "difference" of the individual is naturalised. Such research "locate[s] resistance outside its discursive construction, and reif[ies] agency as an inherent attribute of individuals, thus decontextualising it" (Scott, 1992, p.25).

In order to understand the implications, for transsexuals, of basing identity and political action upon commonalities of experience, it may be informative to draw on instances where women, who have identified as feminist, have based their interpretations of their experiences and their political actions on this commonality. In feminist research, the authority of women's experience has often been relied upon to establish women's identity and agency. Denise Riley (1988) argues that this approach prevents us from exploring important issues such as how agency is made possible, how ethnicity and sexuality intersect with gender, and how experience is organised and interpreted by politics. Scott adds that it is the discursive character of experience which has been masked and which is now problematic (Scott, 1992).

In research which focuses on difference, it is important to consider the context in which, and the mechanisms by which, that difference is constructed. "Making visible the experience of a different group exposes the existence of repressive mechanisms, but not their inner workings or logics; we know that difference exists, but we don't understand it as constituted relationally" (Scott, 1992, p.25). In this research, I do

work from the experiences of transsexuals as articulated by them, but always to situate those experiences discursively, maintaining a critical awareness of the “repressive mechanisms” involved in the construction of transsexuality.

The Research Process as a Critique of “Knowing”

In response to concerns about the political implications of the status of “knowledge” in my thesis, I am drawn to Gibson-Graham’s comments on feminist research as a process of “discursive destabilization”.

As a feminist researcher, I am coming to understand my political project as one of discursive destabilization. One of my goals is to undermine the hegemony of the binary gender discourse and to promote alternative subject positions for gendered subjects. I see my research as (participating in) creating identity / subjectivity, and in that process as constituting alternative sites of power and places of political intervention. ... I understand my discursive interventions as ... political as well as academic.

(Gibson-Graham, 1996, p.241)

Like Gibson-Graham, I do not present my research as a series of truths or understandings which provide a ground from which social change can occur. Rather, the very articulation and analysis of the transsexual and transgender participants’ perspectives constitute a discursive opening - a part of an on-going conversation - through which discursive positions vis-à-vis “gender” and “identity” become possible. This conversation is, then, part of a discursive enabling through which the power to define and create “knowledge” and “transsexuality” is unsettled. This is not the same as a modernist approach to knowledge that suggests “we understand the world *in order* to change it” (Gibson-Graham, 1996, p.237), nor it is simply about the proliferation of gender-possibilities. Social change and political subversion require more than the discursive explosion of possibilities which is currently taking place with

regard to sexual and gendered ways of being (Butler, 1993). Indeed, to simply participate in that very explosion would not be subversive at all.

For the current work to be viable - politically and academically - there needs to be an analysis of the interviewees' talk. The present analysis stems from my commitment to aspects of queer and transgender political projects while retaining a critical distance from how such projects are articulated and carried out. I focus on how transsexuality is situated through psycho-medical discourses, the politics of transgenderism, and the academic field of queer theory. Each of these three forms a critical ground and a knowledge frame through which transsexuality may be defined, understood, "known". I employ queer and poststructuralist feminist critiques to unsettle "knowledge" about transsexuality and to expose as processes of construction the ways in which such knowledge has been arrived at. I perceive this as part of the wider project of seeking out the crevices in the process of (normative) gendering, and therefore present this as a work of political as much as academic significance. The viability of this project relies upon a simultaneous destabilising and redeployment of terms such as "experience", "knowledge", "gender", and "identity".

Identity and Knowledge

Butler (1990) argues that identity categories are normative and thus exclusionary and never merely descriptive. Therefore identity can never form a stable base upon which a feminist political movement may be established. This does not mean the death of the category "woman". It means that it is necessary to "deconstruct the subject of feminism ... not ... to censure its usage, but ... to release the term into a future of multiple significations" (Butler, 1990, p.16). If "woman" is a site of possible resignifications then the possibilities of what it means to be a woman are expanded and an enhanced sense of agency may be enabled. I suggest that the category "transsexual" may be a site of resignifications in a similar way to that which Butler outlines above with regard to the category "woman". Therefore, the aim of this work is to open up the possibility of multiple understandings of transsexuality which contradict those

understandings that have been instrumental in the containment of variety among people who identify themselves, or are identified by others, as “transsexual”.

Making identity-based knowledge-claims has been an important strategy for many wishing to challenge the oppression of marginalised groups. This kind of knowledge production has taken various forms such as: researching and writing histories (e.g., Feinberg’s *Transgender Warriors*), telling one’s own story and extrapolating from that to produce a political analysis (e.g., Bornstein’s *Gender Outlaw*), and carving out for oneself space within legitimated institutions of knowledge-production, such as the academy, and writing one’s own identity / politics within that context (e.g., Stryker’s *Words to Victor Frankenstein*). Each of these strategies gives the (marginalised) activist authority, enables voices from that marginal group to be heard in a public forum, and presents the knowledges thus produced as legitimate.

An assumption often underlying this genre of political strategy is that “subjects located at the social margins have an epistemic advantage over those located in the social center” (Bar On, 1993, p.85). That is, the knowledge generated from within a marginal group necessarily provides a more “real” or more valid picture of what it is to identify with that group and what are the (political) implications of that identification, compared with knowledge generated by outsiders studying the group in question. Here, marginalised *experience* is the basis for *knowledge*. This further implies that, as epistemic privilege is a “function of the distance from the center ... [then presumably] the more distant one is from the centre, the more advantageous is one’s point of view” (Bar On, 1993, p.89). If I was to pursue this line of thinking, I would have to question the relevance of anything *I* could write about transsexuality, given that I cannot claim “transsexual experience”. I would also have to ask how my “experience” of “being queer” relates to the (epistemologically privileged) marginality of “being transsexual”. As a queer woman, am I nearer to or further from the “centre” relative to the transsexuals involved in this research? How do “queer” and “transsexual” figure relative to one another on a socio-political terrain whose “centre” may be constructed as epistemologically privileged?

Bat-Ami Bar On describes how some feminists have conceived of a “liberated space” which one may enter if one is socially situated at a certain distance from a hegemonic centre. This understanding of marginality echoes through transgender texts and interview transcripts. It clearly has implications for my involvement in the research. When initially proposing to pursue research on transsexuality, it felt important to me to articulate my position such that I, as a queer / bisexual woman, could justify writing about transsexuality even though I am an “outsider” to transsexual identities / communities. Having outsider status, I felt, could mean that I had no right to be doing this research. In adhering to such a view, I was making the very assumption about epistemic privilege that Bar On critiques. I was not the only researcher to do this. Early in the process of forming international networks which would contribute to this research, I was e-mailed by a transgender researcher who politely suggested that trans research would be better left to transpeople themselves. Interestingly, I have not directly encountered that view again in the course of almost four years’ work. Instead, thankfully, I have received enormous encouragement and support from transpeople for this research.

At least as important for the continuation of this research are the changes that have occurred in my own theoretical approach. While I was formerly concerned about the appropriateness of my writing about transsexuality, I am now able to frame that writing in a way that overcomes my concerns. Rather than claiming epistemic privilege on the basis of my identity (as a feminist, a queer / bisexual woman, or a psychology / feminist studies student) I am framing my thesis so that *any* claims to epistemic privilege are suspect. I use stories about “experience” from the interviews not to present an alternative “truth” but to further trouble writing by transsexuals about gender and transgender politics. Rather than seeking to produce some knowledge or “discovery” about transsexuality or transsexuals’ lives, I am questioning the ways in which knowledge operates in the discursive construction of transsexuality. Nevertheless my “outsider” status does have implications, and these are most clearly demonstrated in the context of interviews.

Whilst those who have participated in my research have been extremely open and willing to share their stories with me, there have in some cases been references to the

question of insider / outsider status. I did not feel these references were posed as challenges to the appropriateness of my researching transsexuality. Rather, they were passing comments about the different “languages” interviewees perceived to be spoken by transpeople versus non-transsexual academics and health professionals. For instance, Tania (who has, herself, written about transsexuality in academic contexts) told me that she was using a different language in talking with me than she would if talking with another transperson. She said:

If you and I were both transsexuals, we would talk in [a] different language. But taking on the formality of an interview, I would intellectualise it

...

The safety in that is that I don't switch to a particular language, which I might be familiar with ... but you may not be, or your readers may not be, and so a queen might come along and read it and go 'ha ha ha!' He'd sort of be able to read between the lines and you might miss it.

Here, I was clearly an “outsider”. This did not mean that I was excluded from the conversation, but that the conversation ought (in Tania’s view) to take place within a linguistic framework that she perceived to suit me. This was perplexing to me since, as I understood it, both Tania and I existed within the intersections between academic and trans/queer communities and were therefore familiar with the associated ways of speaking about sexuality / gender. I have therefore sought less obvious interpretations of Tania’s comment about language and my outsider status. One interpretation is that this provided Tania a way of avoiding talking about certain issues or engaging in a level of familiarity which she might have found uncomfortable. Another interpretation is that Tania’s construction of a transgender in-group is part of her attempt to reclaim transgender ways of being by holding transpeople in higher esteem than non-transpeople. This approach was taken up more overtly by Don, in his talk about being fa’afafine. Don explicitly challenged palagi¹⁷ ways of talking about gender and sexuality, incorporating in his critique comments that elevated fa’afafine above women

¹⁷ Palagi, or paalagi, is the Samoan equivalent of the Maaori word “pakeha”.

and men, simultaneously reclaiming fa'afafine identity and privileging a fa'afafine world view.

By couching this thesis in terms of a poststructuralist critique of knowledge, experience, and identity, I am able to engage critically with the “in-group / out-group” talk evident in Tania’s and Don’s interviews. Instead of doubting my place in such conversations, I can hear this talk as providing clues about the epistemic assumptions Tania and Don are making. Whilst I applaud the pride and strength in Don’s affirmations of fa'afafine identity, I can also read Don’s suggestion that fa'afafine are somehow more special than men or women as a clear example of what Bar On critiques.

Bar On (1993) suggests that grounding epistemic privilege in the identities and practices of marginalised groups is problematic in so far as it idealises certain practices and excludes others. What counts as valid “knowledge” within that group becomes limited as the identities and practices of the group are assumed to be homogeneous. So, for instance, among some transgenderists, practices which highlight gender ambiguity may be validated. These practices are based on the “knowledge” (knowledge which supposedly defines the group) that one is neither a man nor a woman and that presenting ambiguously constitutes a politically esteemed act. The exclusion brought about by this epistemological frame impacts on those who wish to live simply as “men” or “women”. The practices of passing may be invalidated and the “knowledge” that one is “really a wo/man” is dismissed as a case of false consciousness. Thus, the attempt to create a “liberated space” by articulating knowledge about transgender practices and identities effectively sets up exclusions. These exclusions form the boundaries around **which** transgender experiences, identities, and practices are validated; **which** transpeople “count” in the politics of transgenderism, and **who** has access to the “liberated spaces” that are supposedly being created. This thread of the discussion is taken up more fully in Chapters Eight and Nine.

In the attempt of marginal groups to gain epistemic authority, the risk of idealising certain identities and practices but not others is inevitable. Bar On tempts the reader

with the suggestion that “what should follow from this is a recommendation to give up epistemic privilege” (1993, p.94), but then goes on to point out how important and empowering the claim for epistemic privilege has been for the political movements of marginal groups.

At this point I must acknowledge my ambivalence about the stance I am taking. In proposing to write a thesis where knowledge, experience and identity are brought into question, I must consider the relationships which make this thesis possible. So far, I have mentioned concerns about my position within the researcher/researched relationship, and questioned the appropriateness of my researching transsexuality. But what of the other relationships that are necessarily involved? As a doctoral thesis - written by someone working in the lower echelons of a highly stratified and élitist international network - does this thesis not claim some “authority”? In putting this thesis forward with the hope of being awarded a university degree, am I not claiming some privileged form of ... knowledge? And as a budding queer / feminist researcher, am I not deploying transsexuality as a topical issue, the articulate discussion of which might result in publications with my name on them? I do not intend to labour this issue. I want merely to indicate that I am not entirely convinced that this thesis is immune to its own critiques of claims to epistemic privilege. Nor is it necessarily above seeking the political/academic rewards that might be gained through such claims.

Nevertheless, in considering transsexuality, I seek to interpret such politically motivated knowledge claims as strategies employed in the name of empowerment rather than as claims to truth. Politically motivated knowledge claims of transgenderists may be read as a “demand that ... voices that have been excluded through the process of social marginalization, be given the respectful attention given to the voices of socioculturally hegemonic experts” (Bar On, 1993, p.95). While supporting the central agenda of challenging normative practices which marginalise transpeople, and while seeking to give the “respectful attention” their political claims deserve, I wish also to engage in critique. This critique of transsexual and transgender texts is not for the purpose of undermining their political goals, but in the interests of presenting challenges through which the theoretical articulation of those goals might

become more comprehensive and the associated political practices become better informed by the insights of other identity-based political movements.

Bar On informs my approach to transgenderists' claims of epistemic privilege by reminding me both of the pitfalls and advantages of making such claims. In the final analysis, perhaps the claim to epistemic privilege is yet another attempt to use the "master's tools" to "dismantle the master's house".¹⁸ However, this is an attempt that deserves to be taken seriously because:

when the oppressed feel a need to authorize speech, they are acting on feelings that are a function of their oppression. Speech needs to be authorized only where silence is the rule. This is an oppressive rule. It need not be obeyed, and the justification of disobedience in this case is not a special kind of expertise guaranteed by epistemic privilege but rather by the demands of justice.

(Bar On, 1993, p.97)

¹⁸ Bar On (1993, p.97) draws from Lourde (1984) in using this metaphor.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH PROCESS

In planning the research process, I had three main objectives: I wanted to employ a method that would incorporate transsexual and transgender people's voices and ensure that their words would be taken seriously; I wanted those voices to represent a diverse range of transsexual and transgender perspectives; and I wanted, if this is possible, to present an analysis of those transpeople's talk that "worked" as an academic project without misrepresenting or over-riding the speakers' intent.

The first of these objectives could have been satisfied by working with written texts such as autobiographies and transgender academic writings. However, (as I have said in Chapter Two) I chose not to work with autobiographies because of the specific pressures towards stereotypic stories about transsexuality that can operate through that particular medium (Bates, 1997). Another problem with choosing autobiographies as primary source material is that my study would then have been more removed from Aotearoa / New Zealand, and the cultural diversity and specificities of this location would subsequently have been lost from my work.¹⁹ Furthermore, conducting interviews facilitated the generation of certain kinds of stories about transsexuality, and of texts open to certain kinds of analysis, which would have been very different had I chosen to work with autobiographical material. Therefore, I chose to work with interviews, selecting the interviewees so that a diverse range of perspectives (from the point of view of the interviewees' cultural, religious, educational, geographic locations) might resonate through the thesis. Thus, the diversity of interviewees from within Aotearoa / New Zealand is complemented by the writings of transgenderists publishing internationally (though mostly from the U.K. and the U.S.A.), against which I read the interviewees' talk. I attempt to read various transsexual and transgendered person's talk against one another. In presenting an analysis of the discursive and

¹⁹ Possibly the only transsexual biographies to be written within Aotearoa / New Zealand are those of *Carmen* (Martin, 1988) and Denise Tilling. Tilling's autobiography was published two years after I began this research.

political implications of that talk, I try to avoid an academic analysis which “talks over” the interviewees. In developing my analysis, I have balanced precariously between a discourse analytic approach and a descriptive interviewing approach.²⁰

Because of the complex and controversial nature of the current debates within transsexual / transgender communities, I chose not only to conduct one-to-one interviews, but to also facilitate a group workshop. Here, I was able to bring together a reasonably diverse group of transpeople to discuss contentious issues which had arisen during the interviews, and which I could see being grappled with in the international forum of transgender writings. Together, the interview and workshop transcripts have provided me with central source material for this thesis. Themes from these discussions form the basis for certain chapters, and excerpts from the transcripts are discussed in almost every chapter. My main purpose in this chapter is to outline how I carried out the research with regard to the processes of interviewee selection, interviewing, workshop preparation and facilitation, and transcript analysis, as well as presenting a brief discussion of methodological issues pertinent for this research process. I conclude this chapter with a discussion of how the subsequent chapters have evolved out of the transcript analysis. I hope to provide a clear sense of how the interviewees’ and workshop participants’ talk has been integral to the development of the thesis as a process and as a written product.

Methodology

Methodological considerations underpinning my research process have been shaped by discussions of feminist methodologies.²¹ Concerns which I discuss here relate to

²⁰ My distinction between discourse analysis and descriptive interviewing will be clarified later in this chapter via reference to Hollway (1989).

²¹ Drawing from feminist methodological writings here requires some liberal interpretation, as these writings tend to assume that subjects of feminist research are unproblematically *women*. Clearly, in any quotations that follow, it is necessary to read the frequent references to

questions of reflexivity and the interpretation of transcript material. I highlight these issues because they are central to the researcher/researched relationship. As such, they provide a springboard for discussion of how I attempt to position myself in the research and how I hope to engage critically but respectfully with transcript material.

According to Lather, feminist research is ideally "a change-enhancing, reciprocally educative encounter" (Lather, 1991, p.72) and "to do feminist research is to put the social construction of gender at the centre of one's inquiry" (Lather, 1991, p.71). It is for these reasons that some feminists have found transsexuality / transgenderism an important but contentious topic for research. To what extent is feminist research on transsexuality likely to be "reciprocally educative" and according to whose political agendas is any "change" likely to take place through such research? These are questions that have impacted on my research process but are less likely to emerge explicitly in the final written product.

Lather also writes about research as praxis and as a means of developing emancipatory theory. With regard to the importance of reflexivity and critique she states that "[r]esearch which encourages self and social understanding and change-enhancing action on the part of 'developing progressive groups' requires research designs that allow us as researchers to reflect on how our value commitments insert themselves into our empirical work" (Lather, 1991, p.80). Certainly, this research has involved considerable reflexivity and, ultimately, conceptual reframing on my part. Although I began with a commitment to research as directly and literally "change-enhancing", I have moved considerably towards presenting critique and analysing the discursive investments of (queer / trans) social change movements. Whilst I started out with strong commitments to writing about transsexuality through queer / feminist frameworks, I have finished by critiquing the relationship between queer and transgender theoretical and political projects. Perhaps the kinds of shifts I have gone through in the process of doing this research can be understood to be a result of considering the kinds of questions Lather suggests. These include:

"women" as relating to the author's feminist agenda, not to any agenda of mine to foreground the perspectives of participants who live/identify as "women".

Who are my 'Others'? What binaries structure my arguments? ... Did I make resistant discourses and subject positions more widely available? Did my work multiply political spaces and prevent the concentration of power in any one point? Perhaps most importantly, did it go beyond critique to help in producing pluralized and diverse spaces for the emergence of subjugated knowledges and for the organisation of resistance? ... [And did] I encourage ambivalence, ambiguity and multiplicity, or did I impose order and structure?

(Lather, 1991, p.84)

I would like to suggest that if I had simply followed my original intentions, failing to reflexively critique my own research process or political investments, I could have produced work that merely “impose[d] order and structure”. Instead, by working critically with a range of texts on transsexuality, and allowing my original investments to be challenged, I hope to have produced a thesis where “ambivalence, ambiguity and multiplicity” have been encouraged and, through which, further trans-disciplinary debates may be inspired.

Whilst working reflexively may provide one step towards doing research as a “mutually educative” process, there are still unresolved tensions underlying that goal. To some extent, proposing that feminist research ought to be “mutually educative”, assumes some similarity of perspective or of political/educative intent between the researcher and the researched. Whilst this assumption may be pertinent in some feminist research, it certainly is not in mine. In fact, I explicitly chose research participants with divergent political views, many of whom were likely to regard me as a naïve onlooker to transgender debates. In this case, it would be arrogant of me to presume an agenda of mutual education. Of more concern to me was the question of how those interviewees might feel upon reading my interpretation of what they said.

For feminists, the issue of interpretive authority is particularly problematic, for our work often involves a contradiction. On the one hand, we seek to empower the women we work with by revaluing their

perspectives ... On the other, we hold an explicitly political vision of the structural conditions that lead to particular social behaviours, a vision that our field collaborators, many of whom do not consider themselves feminists, may not recognise as valid.

(Borland, 1991, p.64)

Borland's suggestion that the feminist researcher's political perspective may not match that of her research participants is particularly apt in the case of my research. Nevertheless, it is imperative that I offer some kind of interpretation, analysis, critique and engagement with interviewees' talk, for my project to constitute "research" at all. Because of my simultaneous commitments to academic scholarship, certain political agendas, and foregrounding transsexual / transgender voices through my work, I find myself treading a fine line. I, like Borland, find that

despite my confidence in the validity of my reading as a feminist scholar, personally I continue to be concerned about the potential emotional effect alternative readings of personal narratives may have on our living subjects. ... Our scholarly representation of those performances, if not sensitively presented, may constitute an attack on our collaborators' carefully constructed sense of self.

(Borland, 1991, p.71)

One way I have managed to juggle my concerns and agendas with regard to how I read interviewees' texts is to engage in intertextual readings among various transgender texts, letting transpeople's texts "speak to" one another through my thesis. Perhaps this is an instance of what Wasserfall refers to as "tak[ing] responsibility" when she writes: "ethnographers cannot pretend to present fully their informants' voices: they have to take responsibility for their intrusions both on their informants' lives and the representation of those lives" (Wasserfall, 1997, p.155).

Before embarking on a description of my actual research process, I would like to draw once again from Wasserfall (1997) to highlight some tensions that have arisen between "feminist" methodologies and "postmodernist" research agendas. These tensions

emerge in Wasserfall's text in the course of her discussion of reflexivity. Feminist methodologies have widely recognised the importance of reflexivity as one way in which feminist research distances itself from the assumptions of objectivity held within positivist research. Reflexivity enables the researcher to be overtly aware and critical of (his/her) position in the research process and of the presence of an "I" in the text that ensues. To some extent, such efforts of feminist methodology and epistemology to challenge objectivism and positivism in research are consistent with postmodern critiques. Yet the relationship between feminist research methods and postmodern critique is not easy. This is demonstrated by Wasserfall (1997) who describes a reading of reflexivity where

the issues of difference and power - endemic to researcher/subject relationship - could be directly confronted and worked through via reflexivity. For feminists do not want only to learn about reality but they also want to help change the social reality in which women live their lives ... For example ... while sharing some of the agenda of Postmodernism [some] feminists ... strongly differ from it because postmodernism precludes the possibility of liberating political action.

On closer scrutiny, this political agenda of feminist scholars reveal a tension between knowing and changing. Acknowledging the political agenda of feminism and calling for self-reflexivity and exposing biases does not in itself ease the tension of power difference between the researcher and her informants. What exactly can a feminist ethnographer do to help change her informants' lives while conducting her research according to the canons of her own discipline (Patai, 1991)? Some ethnographers like Berger Gluck (1991) will certainly choose to solve this tension by becoming the advocate of the people they study.

(Wasserfall, 1997, p.153)

I cite this lengthy quotation, not because it echoes my concerns, but rather because it exemplifies problematic understandings about the agendas of "feminist research".

While to some extent, on some conceptual level, I do see my work as “help[ing] to change the social reality in which wo[/]men live their lives”, I have certainly not set out “to help change [my] informants’ lives”. And while I wholeheartedly endorse “the possibility of liberating political action”, unlike Wasserfall I do not regard such action as being precluded by postmodernism. Rather, I think it is important to conceive of the very process of feminist postmodernist²² research in terms of activism, thus resisting the tendency to keep separate the “political” from the “academic”. However, I agree with Wasserfall that doing feminist research “reveal[s] a tension between knowing and changing”(an issue which I revisit in Chapter Twelve). And, like Gluck (1991), the opportunity to act as an advocate or networking agent among research participants arose for me also (see Chapter 12 for further discussion of this). Though, unlike Gluck, I chose not to take up this role.

Although I do not see it as my role to act as an advocate or networking agent for transsexual and transgendered, I have established my own networks with transsexual and transgendered people within Aotearoa / New Zealand and overseas. In some instances, these contacts were forged through similar research interests. In other instances, I met transsexual and transgendered people as prospective research participants.

Accessing and Selecting Interviewees

The first part of making contact with potential interviewees had effectively been taking place since long before I conceptualised my Ph.D. topic. Meeting transsexual and transgendered people and talking with them about their concerns, their understandings of gender, and the lack of specialised support available to them has been happening in

²² I prefer to regard my work in terms of “poststructuralism” which I understand enables specific modes of critique and challenge to the oppressive categorising and naming of sexualities and genders. Here, however, I use the term “postmodernism” in reply to Wasserfall.

my life for some years and initially prompted me towards doing this research. Making contact with potential interviewees was just an extension of that process.

After attaining ethical approval for this research, I sent out 70 questionnaires (Appendix A) to transsexual / transgendered people. These questionnaires were sent to people with whom I had made contact through personal connections, people who had heard of my work and written to me for information, people whom I had heard of as a result of their coming out as trans in mainstream media, friends of friends, and friends of other transsexuals who knew me personally. I also sent some questionnaires to counsellors and psychiatrists who worked with transsexuals, and to the people within the New Zealand Prostitutes' Collective who organise the outreach programme for transsexuals.

The main criterion I kept in mind when selecting interviewees from the pool of questionnaire respondents was that I wanted the interviewees to be as diverse a group as possible in terms of gender, age, involvement with transsexual politics, feelings about SRS, surgical status, sexuality, and ethnicity.

Profile of Interviewees

The eleven interviewees chosen are described below, using information which they gave me through the questionnaire. All of the interviewees with female names are MTF and those with male names are FTM. All of the names are pseudonyms, most of which were chosen by the interviewee. In instances where interviewees declined to suggest pseudonyms, I chose them.

Mimi

Mimi is a 46 year old MTF lesbian who also identifies with the terms: female, woman, transsexual, intersexual, white. At the time of the interview, Mimi was approximately ten years post-surgery.

Babe

On the questionnaire, Babe circled the words: male, transsexual, man, female-to-male, and indicated that he had had some SRS. He identifies himself as Cook Island Maori. At the time of filling out the questionnaire, he was 37 years old and a tertiary student.

Myra

On the questionnaire, Myra circled the words: male, transsexual, transgendered, and male-to-female. She identifies herself as Pakeha²³ and was 49 years old at the time of the interview. She envisages possibly having SRS in the future.

Jim

On the questionnaire, Jim circled the words: male, transsexual, man, post-operative, female-to-male, and heterosexual. Jim had “top” surgery 20 years ago, and “bottom” surgery 7 years ago and was 46 years old at the time of the interview. He identifies himself as a Caucasian New Zealander.

Ami

On the questionnaire, Ami circled the words: female, transsexual, woman, transgendered, post-operative, and heterosexual. She had surgery one year prior to the interview and was 25 years old at the time of the interview. Ami identifies herself as Pakeha.

Tracey

Tracey circled the following words on the questionnaire: female, transgendered, woman, non-operative, male-to-female, and heterosexual. She then wrote that by “heterosexual” she meant that she was attracted to women, both when she was living as [her male name] and when she was identifying as Tracey.

²³ Pakeha is the Maaori word referring to the white people who colonized Aotearoa / New Zealand, during the nineteenth century, and their descendants.

Mark

On the questionnaire, Mark identified himself as Parsee Zoroastrian. Mark didn't circle any of the words provided, writing instead that he would describe himself as male, but that the correct medical terminology is female to male transsexual. At 25, Mark is in the early stages of hormone therapy.

Don

Don identifies strongly as a Samoan fa'afafine. He was 45 years old at the time of the interview, and has lived in Aotearoa / New Zealand for about 35 years. He has never seriously considered SRS and is very willing to be visible as fa'afafine.

Tania

Tania identified herself as a 36 year old Maori / Pakeha. She circled the words: transsexual, transgendered, pre-operative, and heterosexual, and wrote that she is "unique - neither male nor female but a mix of both arising out of a unique experience". At the time of the interview, she considered that she may have SRS in the future.

Jean

Jean identifies herself as a 55 year old European (i.e.: White New Zealander) female. She made it clear that she wished she could have had SRS, but that now it is an impossibility due to a combination of age, disability and financial factors.

Pat

Pat is a 32 year old Maaori²⁴ FTM who circled the words: male, man and heterosexual. He also said that he liked to call himself "King", the FTM equivalent of "Queen". He had had his initial surgery ("top" only) a year prior to the interview.

²⁴ Maaori, also spelt Maori, is the collective name which refers to the various indigenous tribes of Aotearoa / New Zealand. I privilege the former spelling because it highlights the long vowel sound and appears to be the preferred spelling in Maaori language texts.

Developing an interview schedule

The interview schedule (Appendix C) was developed with the understanding that it would provide me only with guidelines as to what topic areas to cover during the interview. Part of the process of developing questions for the interview schedule involved working from my stated research questions and aims to articulate open-ended questions designed to encourage interviewees to talk about their perspectives, within certain topic areas. The other main aspect of developing the interview schedule involved a series of interview practice-sessions intended to refamiliarise²⁵ me with interviewing process and to help me find appropriate ways to frame potentially sensitive questions. During these practice-sessions, I also developed some understanding of NLP (neuro-linguistic programming) concepts to do with the relationship between language use and sensory modalities. This was useful in so far as it enabled me to be sensitive to the possibility of increasing rapport and empathy between myself and an interviewee by mirroring their use of modal operators.

The research questions (Appendix G) that guided me through this exploratory phase were: What do gender identity and transsexuality mean to transsexual people and into what discourses do transsexuals insert themselves in order to make sense of, and construct, their experiences? How might a study of the discursive construction of transsexuality be useful for understanding of the political forces which affect the lives of transsexuals? Given the ways bodies are currently constructed within Western society through various dominant discourses, what are the political implications of the visible, vocal, corporeal challenges to this construction which some transsexuals appear to be making?

The schedule which I developed for the interviews covered central topics of:

- ⇒ labelling oneself or being labelled as transsexual / transgendered;
- ⇒ regarding oneself as a wo/man;

²⁵ To a large extent, in the current research, I have been drawing on interviewing experience gained through interviewing a small sample of bisexual women for my Masters thesis.

- ⇒ experiences of, and responses to, having one's "gender identity" brought into question;
- ⇒ experiences which had led the interviewee to think of themselves as transsexual / transgendered;
- ⇒ understandings of transsexuality in terms of disease / disorder, or a transitional state;
- ⇒ bases for decisions around taking hormones and undergoing SRS;
- ⇒ the importance of passing;
- ⇒ understandings of, and feelings about, the words: transsexual, transgendered, woman, man;
- ⇒ interaction between self-concept with regard to ethnic identity and trans/gendered identity.

After this initial exploratory phase the method of analysis and the research questions went through various changes before the current thesis emerged. The method of analysis necessarily informs and is informed by the research questions and the current thesis had to evolve out of the process of deciding what these were. Because such an enormous array of possibilities were generated by the wonderfully rich and fascinating transcript material, it took some time before the current focus of the thesis was developed.

Carving a path for the thesis involved weighing up various concerns. This was impacted upon by my sense of uncertainty about my position as a former psychology student within a feminist studies department. For me, this transition involved some confusion about how to usefully employ my learning as a psychology student whilst also taking on board the feminist critiques of psychology I was learning about in my new department. This was not just a question of changing disciplines; feminist studies considers itself to be interdisciplinary. This was a question of feeling that everything I had ever learnt was being brought into question. This was a matter of moving from the stance of a radical feminist working in psychology, to take up a poststructuralist feminist critique of psychology. This necessarily meant critiquing associated concepts such as identity, self, language, experience, knowledge, gender, and sexuality. All these areas in which I had felt articulate and confident prior to embarking on doctoral

research had now been thrown into question. Hence I had an overwhelming sense that there was nothing left to hold on to. This enormous epistemological gulf needed to be traversed in order for the current thesis to emerge from the initial research aims.

Despite this inevitably agonising process, I eventually found a way to pursue the political and theoretical concerns which had driven the research from the beginning, whilst working within a poststructuralist feminist framework, and drawing from the transcript material I had already accumulated.

An Initial "Trial" Interview

I conducted the first interview with Mimi, whom I had met previously and with whom I felt particularly comfortable. I explained to her that I would like some feedback from her about how she found the interview process, and that my supervisor would have access to the taped interview. The purpose of this initial interview was to work through the interview process I had planned, and then to reassess my questions and my technique before doing any further interviews. The actual analysis and discussion of this interview has now been included with the analysis and discussion of the other interviews, so in this sense this initial interview was not just a "trial".

The interview took place in the interviewee's home and was audio-taped simultaneously on two recording systems, as I was also trying these out for quality and practicability. After the interview, Mimi told me that she felt as though it had been more like a discussion than an interview. This was just the feedback I needed to tell me that I was on the desired path with regard to interviewing style!

Both my supervisor and I listened to the recording of the initial interview with Mimi. Through our discussions of this initial interview, I was able to reconsider and refine my interviewing strategies. This related particularly to the way I listened to interviewees' talk and the need to follow up important points immediately.

Interviewing transsexual / transgendered people

During April and May of 1996 I interviewed eleven people, audio-taping each interview. In most cases, the interview took place in the interviewee's home. In some cases the interviewee and I spent quite some time together talking, going out for coffee, looking at old photographs of them before they had undergone transition, and talking about transsexual networks within Aotearoa / New Zealand. In some cases, my strong sense of needing to maintain confidentiality was challenged when two different interviewees, whom I had met on two different days, turned out to know one another and started talking about each other. This put me in an interesting and quite amusing position, and I soon learnt to explain that I was under obligation to refrain from identifying any of the interviewees but: "Yes, I do happen to know who you are talking about"! This became a bit of a joke eventually, as it was obvious to me that I had tapped into a close-knit circle of people who were effectively involved in the same "national transsexual community", and who therefore knew each other and had already talked with one another about me and my research. They knew who the interviewees were; I was the only one maintaining confidentiality!

There are other ways in which I have found that my role as an interviewer has been stretched in the course of my interactions with the interviewees. One interviewee and his partner expressed great enthusiasm about my work, and then tried very hard to convince me that I should set up a national network for transsexual and transgendered people. Another interviewee, who is very early on in his process of exploring his "female" identity, has written to me since the interview to ask my opinion on what he was wearing during the interview. (I found it most ironic that I should be consulted for tips on feminine dress sense!)

Some interviewees had a partner or a member of their whanau present during the interview. This seemed useful from my point of view and theirs, providing an interesting perspective on the interviewee's talk. I felt that in some cases, the anecdotes and impressions which were shared by the interviewee's significant other

were particularly illuminating with regard to the interviewee's development of an understanding of themselves as gendered.

The Workshop

The "workshop" was a small-group discussion conducted on 21st April, 1997 at the University of Canterbury.²⁶ The immediate purpose of the workshop was to facilitate talk about issues which emerged during interviews but which I felt could be better explored through multivocal discussion. In terms of the thesis more broadly, the workshop contributed to the multi-vocal engagement with transgender politics, found particularly in Parts Three and Four. There were six people present, four of whom were workshop participants selected by the researcher. These four will be referred to by the pseudonyms: Sarah, Kal, Mimi, and Tim. The other two people present were Kaye Cederman and me. I facilitated the discussion while Kaye's role in the workshop was primarily as an observer and to attend to practical details such as switching the audio tapes on and off.

The chosen group of workshop participants was diverse in terms of political perspectives, and choices with regard to hormones, surgery, and gender identity. The four participants ranged in age from mid twenties to mid fifties and, when asked to describe their cultural or ethnic identities, used over six different terms indicating a reasonable diversity of cultural background for a group of people currently living in or near Christchurch. The group was also diverse in its range of sexual identifications.

Whilst diversity was a key criterion for the choice of workshop participants, I was also mindful of the ways in which each participant might express themselves in a group, their ability to articulate their ideas in that context, and the question of how each one might deal with having their ideas challenged. In considering these points, I was mostly

²⁶ See Appendix F for the Workshop Plan.

concerned to foster an interaction which would be productive and would not result in any participant feeling uncomfortable about expressing their ideas, withdrawing and / or experiencing the workshop as unpleasant. What I did not consider sufficiently was that some participants might be too willing to share their views, talking over or interrupting other participants. Nevertheless, the four people I had in mind as participants had interacted with me in ways that indicated that they might be willing and able to work together creatively and productively.

To my delight, each of these four people expressed interest in the workshop when first contacted about it, so I sent three of them copies of the information sheet and consent form, saying that I would contact them again when they had had a couple of days to think about it.²⁷ With the fourth person, I made a time to go and visit her to read the information sheet and consent form aloud to her, as s/he had previously told me that s/he did not read.

Before the workshop began, I collected signed consent forms from the four participants and a signed form regarding confidentiality from Kaye (Appendix E).

Workshop Participants

Mimi (who has already been introduced as an interviewee) described herself as a forty-six year old white male-to-female lesbian transsexual who had had surgery eleven years prior to the workshop. Tim is a 24 year old female-to-male transgendered person who describes himself as Pakeha / Maaori and who had had no surgery at the time of the workshop. Kal is a 25 year old Fijian Indian New Zealander who describes herself as a third gender or an “androgyn”. Kal was born male and brought up as a boy. At the time of the workshop s/he seemed ambivalent about the possibility of having surgery in the future. Both Tim and Kal describe themselves as bisexual. Sarah is 47 years old

²⁷ The information sheet and consent form can be found in Appendices D and E, respectively.

and had had (MTF) surgery approximately six years prior to the workshop. She describes herself as a Pakeha transsexual / woman.

Post-Workshop Comments and Observations ²⁸

Tim was often the last to speak on the topics discussed throughout the workshop, but when he did speak, he presented himself calmly and quietly as having sure knowledge of “who he was”. There was a sense that he had learnt to present “who he was” in a congruent manner. He talked about the strategies he had used to ease the changes in his life and that he was keen to help others to learn from what he had experienced.

Mimi was very effective in taking her part in the four-way discussion. She exhibited an acute awareness of the “rules” of conversation; listening, affirming, repairing conversation, and moving the conversation ahead if necessary. She almost had a “watchdog” role where she nurtured the dynamic of the group. It is possible that this role inhibited her from participating as fully as she might have.

Sarah was also a very active listener. She allowed the others to have their say and then presented her viewpoint clearly and firmly. When Kal talked about the ongoing need for politicisation in the present socio-political environment, Sarah placed her “oppression” in the past, as part of her “journey” to get to where she is now and reiterated that in this present state it is fine for her to just be as a woman. Her “journey” was her time of suffering and it was in the telling of this time that she drew on emotive terms. She demonstrated no wish to be part of any current politicisation of transsexuality.

Kal presented as quite attention-seeking in not demonstrating an awareness of turn-taking in conversation and being the first to respond to most of the discussion points. Kal consistently used emotive terms and intensely personalised every aspect of

²⁸ These comments and observations were compiled with the help of Kaye Cederman.

transsexuality discussed. This style was at odds with how the others talked about themselves. There was less of the “distancing” from the topic that was observable in the other participants. Kal was right there with her talk of my body, my relationships, my childhood, my family, my oppression, my understanding of who I am and why politics are important. However, during the break and after the workshop Kal developed relational strands with each of the other participants quickly and skilfully.

There were two unforeseen aspects of the process which I became concerned about during the workshop. These involved Kal’s style of interaction and Sarah’s political position relative to the others.

Early in the workshop, Kal was talking so much compared with the others that I had frightening visions of turning on the tape the next day and being able to hear little other than Kal’s voice. I tried a number of ways of altering this imbalance, the first of which involved using eye contact and body language, being more overtly encouraging towards the other participants whenever they spoke and not quickly shifting my attention to Kal when s/he interrupted one of the others. When this was having no obvious effect, I tried using indirect verbal methods such as waiting until Kal had paused after having made an interruption, and then asking the interrupted speaker to continue what they had been saying. I also tried saying “Thank you for that, Kal, that is very important. I am also keen to hear what anyone else has to say about [current discussion topic]”. Whilst I am sure that these methods went some way to encouraging the other participants to talk, they seemed to do nothing towards curbing Kal’s monologue. My final attempt, however, met with some success. In the second part of the workshop, I politely but firmly pointed out to Kal that everyone in the workshop has different communication styles and that the other participants might find pauses and silences important, and could s/he please not fill them all up with talk. Thankfully, this was met with smiles and laughter all round and Kal obediently took a sip of her drink and listened, for a while!

Following the workshop, although I did not explicitly ask for positive feedback, various comments were made by participants about what a positive experience the workshop had been for them. It was serendipitous that one of the people I was driving

home came to the surprised realisation, out loud in the car, that the workshop had been “almost therapeutic!”. This is an example of how interactions that occur after the tape has been switched off can be crucial to the researcher’s interpretation of the participants’ research experience.

Working with Transcripts

Having completed and transcribed the interviews and workshop, it remained for me to further develop the method of analysis. I began this research project with the intention of exploring a broad range of transsexual issues through interviews and a workshop. In the first instance, this method was driven by my the initial research aims (which have already been outlined and are elaborated in Appendix G). Here I will briefly describe, in terms set out by Hollway (1989), the method of analysis I developed after the exploratory phase. I will then explain how the method of analysis relates to each of the subsequent chapters.

Hollway (1989) outlines the differences between a “descriptive interviewing” method and a method of discourse analysis. She cites Potter and Wetherall’s (1987) initial principle of “the primacy of language and text ... as the site for investigating social psychological issues” (Hollway, 1989, p.32) and goes on to explain that

[t]his principle is practically the only thing which the many variants of discourse analysis have in common, for the term has come to cover virtually any approach which analyses text My own use of the term “discourse” is indebted to Foucault, for whom the term is integrated in an analysis of the production of knowledges (or discourses) within power relations.

(Hollway, 1989, pp.32-33)

As will have already become evident through the first three chapters, my study and Hollway's have much in common with regard to a Foucauldian understanding of power, knowledge and language. While this understanding underpins my reading of transcript (and other reference) material, an outline of my transcript analysis would not be complete without reference to "descriptive interviewing".

The method of descriptive interviewing, commonly used in social science research, is useful, from a feminist perspective, for reporting and validating women's experience (Hollway, 1989). Descriptive interviewing tends to present transcript excerpts that "speak for themselves" and assumes such extracts unproblematically represent the speaker's experience. This method shares with orthodox psychology the idealist assumption that "an account can reflect directly that individual's experience" (Hollway, 1989, p.41) and that "an account will produce facts whose truth-value is not problematic for the research" (p.41).

Hollway (1989) supports this feminist descriptive interviewing approach up to a point but emphasises its difference from discourse analysis. She suggests that

[f]eminist research can, and does, help towards the emancipatory modification of these personal accounts by being sensitive to contradictions and avoidances, by exploring similarities and differences ... and by encouraging participants to go beyond abstract generalities. But to strengthen these achievements feminist method needs to go beyond a psychological theory of subjectivity and its relation to meaning to underpin its understanding of women's experience.

(Hollway, 1989, p.41)

A discourse analytic approach, on the other hand, understands discourse "as a construction and not as the description of performed ideas" (Hollway, 1989, p.33). Here, the number of possible accounts of one's experience is understood to be infinite, and what is *not* said is as important as what *is* said. No account is presumed to tell the whole "truth", rather, this approach employs the Foucauldian notion that "truth is a historical product and therefore no knowledge is absolute" (Hollway, 1989, p.41). The

aim here is to understand the conditions which produce particular accounts and to understand how meaning is produced from those accounts. This challenges the assumption that language is a transparent medium.

By resisting the assumption that language simply reflects experience, feminist research can approach experience critically, not to judge participants' accounts according to notions of truth and falsity, but in order to find ways of "changing our subjectivity through positioning ourselves in alternative discourses which we produce together" (Hollway, 1989, p.43). Through such research it may be "possible to transform the meaning of experience by bringing a different set of assumptions to bear on it" (Weedon, 1987, p.85; also quoted by Hollway, 1989).

From the point of view of my transition from Psychology to Feminist Studies, it makes sense that I have, at times, had a foot on either side of the divide that Hollway depicts between descriptive interviewing and discourse analysis. Like Hollway, I endorse aspects of descriptive interviewing in so far as that process is empowering for research participants and works towards emancipatory goals. Indeed, my Masters research on bisexual women could be regarded as an instance of descriptive interviewing. However, I have wanted to take my analysis in the current research further. Here, my discussion as a whole works from the principles of discourse analysis, but the transcript material has been used differently in different chapters.

My method of analysing transcript material could be described as a thematic content analysis. A number of important questions and issues about the discursive construction of transsexuality arose through the interviews. Around the time of doing interviews, I was simultaneously developing questions about the articulation of transgender politics. These two strands (the discursive construction of transsexuality and the way transgender politics were being articulated) were brought together and discussed in greater depth in the workshop. Out of the interviewees' and workshop participants' discussion of these issues came central themes, some of which form the basis for chapters. Through the thesis, I identify specific issues for transsexual people (issues which emerged in the course of the interviews and were further explored during the workshop) and develop a critique of how these issues are discussed within particular

texts: psycho-medical texts are the focus of Part Three, transgender texts are the focus of Part Four, and queer texts are the focus of Part Five.

In some instances, the theme of a chapter emerged explicitly through the transcripts. Chapter Six, for example, is a product of my analysis of how participants addressed the notion of transsexuality as a case of being “trapped in the wrong body”. This became the focus for a chapter by virtue of the complex and diverse talk generated through interviews and the workshop, and the implications of this talk for medical “treatment” of transsexuals. In this instance, the topic of the chapter emerged as a theme running through the interviews. This is similarly the case for Chapters Seven (where I critique the notion of “gender” as something that can be “known”) and Chapter Nine (where I critique ethnocentrism in transgender theorising). In Chapter Seven, the discussion grew out of my analysis of interviewees’ talk about “gender” as something that is very difficult to define or to “know” with certainty. In Chapter Nine, I present a critique of transgender theorising which stems from my analysis of Maaori and Samoan interviewees’ talk about medicalisation and trans-gendered embodiment.

In some cases, however, the topic of a chapter emerged out of my readings of published transgender texts or academic studies of transsexuality, rather than transcripts. In these instances, I have used transcript material which best “speaks to” the texts I am discussing. It is possibly more difficult to work the transcript excerpts into the argument in this instance, because the topic of inquiry does not necessarily appear as a central theme in the transcripts. I have used this method in Chapter Eight where I discuss transgenderists’ both-and-neither versus transsexuals’ either/or approach to “gender”. Here, transcript quotations are perhaps better understood as presenting examples of the problems transgender texts encounter when they presume to stand (politically) for transsexuals whose views are extremely diverse. Chapter Five draws centrally from psycho-medical texts, employing transcript analysis to springboard a discussion of the complexity of issues that need to be considered with regard to transsexuals’ sexual identities and attractions.

Chapters Ten, Eleven and Twelve foreground discussions among academic texts which relate to transsexuality and the politics of transgenderism. In these chapters, transcript

material does not provide a pivotal aspect of the analysis, but plays a more minor role of illustration and elaboration, drawing the reader's attention back to the relevance of these academic discussions to the lived realities of transsexual and transgender people.

In describing the method of analysis, and the subsequent ways of employing transcript material, I have outlined **how** the transcripts feature in the thesis. What remains, is to discuss **why** the transcript material features as it does.

The transcript material is used in Parts Three, Four, and Five for a number of purposes. Primarily, my motivation for quoting from transcripts is to ensure that transsexual perspectives are articulated clearly through the thesis. A strong agenda I have held through my research is to avoid theorising about identities or communities without acknowledging as fully as possible the perspectives that the people concerned may have on the issues being discussed. Hence, when I wrote my Masters thesis on women who identify as bisexual, a central component of the thesis was the discussion of how bisexual women themselves talked about their decision to identify as bisexual. In the case of my Masters thesis, I felt this to be a somewhat less thorny issue, because I was researching an identity-group to which I belonged. Furthermore, institutional discourses (such as those generated through psycho-medical texts discussed in this thesis) have relatively little investment in constructing meanings around women's bisexual identities. Also, at the time I was researching my Masters thesis, there was a proliferation of writings by, for and / or about bisexual women, bisexual identities, bisexual politics, and feminist bisexuality. Therefore it was easy, in that instance, to ensure that bisexual women's voices (my own included) would be "heard" throughout the text of my thesis. In the case of the current thesis, however, I feel greater care needs to be taken in foregrounding transsexual voices.

I was already aware that for decades transsexual voices had risked being drowned out by psycho-medical discussions, theorising, and clinical practice relating to transsexuality. I soon became aware that even texts purporting to represent transsexuals, such as transsexual autobiographies and queer texts generally, threatened to obscure rather than problematise some very important issues. Therefore, I have endeavoured to use transcript material in ways that enable a diverse range of

transsexual perspectives to be articulated, thus opening up questions that other texts on transsexuality have foreclosed.

Employing transcript material as I have enables me to create a sense of the polylogue that is currently taking place around transsexual issues. The intention, therefore, has been to generate a text which enables discussion across disciplines, which privileges both the political and the theoretical, and through which a diversity of transsexual perspectives is considered. The result is necessarily an intertwining of texts; texts, which not only come from vastly different perspectives, but have different weights, different positions within the thesis.

Another of my agendas throughout the research and writing process has been to present the discussion in a way that is potentially “accessible”. Perhaps this is the naïve dream of a graduate student: that her work might not lie dormant for decades on the library shelf, but might be inspiring, challenging and informative to others. But what do I mean by “accessible”? Accessible to whom? I have reluctantly come to realise the impossibility of writing a doctoral thesis that is accessible to all the people involved in the study. Instead, I have settled for aiming to write a thesis which is interesting to read and provides a multi-layered discussion without being too dense or complex in its articulation. Here, “accessibility” becomes an avoidance of academic élitism. Using quotations from transcripts has helped texture my writing: providing anecdotal information, examples, and light-hearted comments that are fruitful for the discussion while being amusing or intriguing at times. The transcript excerpts also ensure that this thesis is possibly more accessible to an Aotearoa / New Zealand audience than most texts on transsexuality. This is the case in so far as I deal specifically with issues which transsexual people face in this part of the world: issues to do with culturally specific approaches to transsexuality, a small national population, and subsequent difficulties in accessing medical services and technologies or developing a sense of community among transsexual people. I am hopeful that using transcript material as I do allows my work to speak to an audience who may not persevere with reading medical texts or dense theoretical discussions of transsexuality. The audience I have had in mind while writing has consisted of (at least) transsexual research participants, transgender activists and academics, queer researchers more broadly, as well as examiners.

Autobiographical, political, academic, and clinical writings are generated with a certain audience in mind, with the knowledge that the author's name will be forever attached to the text, and with the self-consciousness that evokes. The interviewees and workshop participants, however, were assured that what they were saying would never be traced back to them. (Though this differentiates the research participants' talk from that of transsexual autobiographers and public figures, I do not pretend that the participants' talk was therefore unselfconscious or not adapted for an audience.) Furthermore, unlike their counterparts in clinical studies, there was no sense in which participants' talk during this research would impinge on their access to medical services. Ensuring that this talk was generated in a vastly different context from the other texts discussed meant that greater scope for diversity and contradiction was being simultaneously generated. Hence the importance of using both workshop and one-to-one interview processes for generating transcript material.

Although these two approaches to accumulating transcript material were quite different, and occurred during different phases of the research, I have eventually decided to use the two kinds of transcript material side-by-side, employing the same analytic strategies for each. Although I use excerpts from the two bodies of transcript together, I do signal throughout the text which I am drawing from at any given time.

PART THREE: PSYCHO-MEDICAL CONSTRUCTIONS OF TRANSSEXUALITY

Historically, the first formal attempts to theorise transsexuality can be found within sexological, medical and psychological writings. These writings tend to develop a picture of what transsexuality is, based uncritically on hegemonic assumptions about “gender” and “sexuality”. For many transsexual and transgendered people, the persistence of this uncritical approach to transsexuality is in direct opposition to their wish to affirm diversity and celebrate fluidity. Thus, the psycho-medical institution may represent an oppressive force to be challenged and/or manipulated by transsexuals, but not to be relied upon for support.

In this first substantive section of the thesis, I critique aspects of psycho-medical discourses on transsexuality. A variety of medical and psychological disciplines are implicated in the construction and maintenance of “transsexuality”. Endocrinologists, psychiatrists, surgeons, clinical psychologists, and sexologists each play their part in constituting transsexuality through discourses on “sexuality”, “gender identity” and sexual anatomy and physiology. For the sake of brevity, I refer to these various disciplines and professionals under the term “psycho-medical”. I am concerned not with an exhaustive study of the debates that occur among psycho-medical professionals, but with the overall implications for transsexuals of how “health” professionals conceptualise transsexuality.²⁹

²⁹ There is the risk of homogenising “psycho-medical” approaches to transsexuality, by failing to pay attention to the specific debates which divide psycho-medical professionals. Nevertheless, I suggest it is important to consider, as a whole, the effects and implications of psycho-medical constructions of transsexuality. Despite internal conflicts, these constructions do tend to work together to maintain positivist and ontological assumptions about transsexuality and play a powerful role in determining how transsexual people themselves are

In Chapter Five I look critically at how transsexuality is depicted within the Diagnostic and Statistical Manuals for Mental Disorders (DSM), tracing some of the concerns of gay and transpeople about the implications of classifying “deviant” sexualities and genders as “mental disorders”. My particular focus for this chapter is on how psycho-medical literatures on transsexuality deal with questions of sexual attraction and identity. To what extent do health “professionals” assume transsexual clients to be post-transitionally “heterosexual”? Although homosexuality has not appeared in the DSM in the past 15 years, are transsexuals who wish to identify as post-operatively gay doubly stigmatised, or regarded as suspect, within a clinical setting?

Transsexuality is frequently presented as the experience of “being trapped in the wrong body”. In Chapter Six I discuss both how this idea has been used strategically by transsexuals seeking surgery and how transgenderists have responded to this claim. I suggest that, taken simply, the wrong-body discourse may thwart transsexuals’ attempts to politicise transsexuality. By drawing on interview material, I demonstrate the enormous complexity that is overlooked, both by psycho-medical assumptions that the wrong-body discourse provides an accurate description of transsexuality, and by those transgenderists who avoid theorising the body in order to refute the wrong-body discourse.

“treated”. For other critiques of psycho-medical approaches to transsexuality, see Billings and Urban (1982), Bolin (1988), and Hausman (1995). For examples of studies which focus specifically on certain aspects of what I term “psycho-medical”, see López (1996), Wijngaard (1997), and Nelson (1998).

CHAPTER FIVE: “SEXUALITY” AND THE PSYCHIATRIC CLASSIFICATION OF TRANSSEXUALITY

It is a rather amazing fact that, of the very many dimensions along which the genital activity of one person can be differentiated from that of another (dimensions that include preference for certain acts, certain zones or sensations, certain physical types, a certain frequency, certain symbolic investments, certain relations of age or power, a certain species, a certain number of participants, etc. etc.), precisely one, the gender of object choice, emerged from the turn of the century, and has remained, as the dimension denoted by the now ubiquitous category of ‘sexual orientation’.
(Sedgwick, 1990, p.8)

Introduction

Within medical literatures, transsexuality and homosexuality enact a curious dance: at times sliding together to the extent of being indistinguishable from one another, yet at other times being so distant from one another that their coincidence is inconceivable. Psycho-medical discussions and definitions of these two terms are never simply about developing diagnostic criteria or “understanding” transsexuality for the sake of building functional therapeutic relationships. On the contrary, psycho-medical definitions play a powerful role in determining what “transsexuality” is.

In this chapter, I focus on the process of psycho-medical classification, with particular interest in its portrayal of the relationship between transsexuality and (homo)sexuality. I argue that psycho-medical constructions of transsexuality maintain transsexuality outside of sexual deviance and depict the “true” transsexual as pre-operatively asexual or homosexual and post-operatively heterosexual. Even though much psycho-medical

research on transsexuality pays little or no attention to questions of sexual attractions, such research often perpetuates the assumption that post-transition heterosexual relations will occur.³⁰ This assumption is perhaps most crudely and blatantly played out through surgeon's post-operative assessments where the ability to engage in penis-vagina intercourse is considered to be the mark of successful surgery.³¹ I argue that through such constructions of transsexuals' erotic desires, psycho-medical "treatment" of transsexuality (like the surgical assignment of intersexuals) enables "gender disordered" people to maintain healthy (read: normative) social and sexual relationships.

In the course of this chapter, I draw on the interview transcripts to illustrate the way a discourse of heterocentrism permeates both psycho-medical constructions of transsexual sexualities and (some) transsexuals' talk about their own sexual identities. Through this discussion, it becomes apparent how thoroughly some transsexual people invest in psycho-medical understandings of sexuality. It also becomes apparent that a discussion of the psycho-medical classification of transsexuality necessarily raises questions about the relationship between MTF and FTM transsexuality. These questions are explored with particular regard to interviewees' comments about their sexual identities and sexual attractions. I use the interview material to illustrate conjunctions and disjunctions between the way psycho-medical texts construct

³⁰ In one study which assessed the outcome of SRS for fifty patients, transsexuals were graded on their post-operative adjustment based on various criteria. One of these criteria concerned the living environment, where a transsexual person living alone "was coded as less adjusted than living with a gender-appropriate person but was coded as more adjusted than living with a gender-inappropriate person." (Abramowitz's 1986 critique of the Hopkins Report, p.187).

³¹ An instance of this heterocentric approach to SRS is provided in Hale (1998), where it is reported that "[p]rior to performing penile inversion vaginoplasty (in which penile skin forms the inner lining of the neo-vagina), Eugene Schrang (Neenah, Wisconsin) measures the penises of his mtf patients to ensure that they are long enough to provide 'adequate vaginal depth.' If they are not, he grafts skin from other parts of the bodies to achieve 'adequate vaginal depth.'" (p.107).

transsexuals' sexuality and the way transsexual people talk about their sexual attractions.

By presenting a critique, at this early stage in the thesis, of psycho-medical approaches to transsexuality, I hope to foreshadow ideas about transsexuality developed by transgender theorists (Part Four) and queer theorists (Part Five). This critique strikes at the heart of the drive to set transsexuality up as a state of being that can be known, defined, classified, and ultimately "treated". In this particular chapter I compare assertions about the ontology of transsexuality with efforts to define "sexual orientation"; a construct which, as Sedgwick's quotation suggests, is similarly dubious and arbitrary.

Transsexual - Homosexual Elision

Before the first attempts to define diagnostic criteria for transsexuality, the relationship between homosexuality and transsexuality appears to have been depicted quite differently from how it is currently depicted within psycho-medical literatures. When early sexologists were writing (in the late 19th and early 20th centuries) there was no concept of transsexuality, yet they wrote very clearly about the kinds of gender-crossing phenomena which we might now call transsexuality. This "gender deviant behaviour" was described in terms of "sexual inversion" (Chauncey, 1982).³² Considering the relationship between sexual inversion and transsexuality provides the context within which this century's on-going negotiations of transsexual and homosexual identities make sense.

³² Even when European surgeons began performing SRS, psycho-medical professionals tended to refer to these cases as instances of pseudohermaphroditism or transvestism, not as transsexuality (Meyerowitz, 1998).

I begin this chapter by elaborating on Rosario's argument that sexological writings on sexual inversion obscured transsexuality, effectively conflating it with homosexuality (Rosario, 1996). I then develop my own analysis of the various DSM classifications of sexuality and gender "deviance". I argue that the complex relationship between sexuality and gender is still not adequately addressed within the psycho-medical classification of transsexuality.

Rosario writes that the Italian forensic doctor who coined the term "inversion of the sexual instinct" recognised that this "inversion" concerned both (what might now be called) gender-crossing and homosexual desire. However, at that time many other researchers tended to conflate "gender identity" and "sexual orientation" in their discussions of sexual inversion. Subsequently, twentieth century writings have drawn links between inversion and homosexuality, and between transvestism and transsexuality, without adequately exploring the conceptual links between inversion and contemporary transsexuality.³³ Consider, for instance, the following excerpt from Kraft-Ebing's description of what he refers to as "congenital contrary sexual sensation in women," and as "homosexuality":

The masculine soul in the female bosom announces itself with an Amazonian inclination to manly sports, as well as occupations demanding courage and manly character. There is a strong desire to imitate male hairstyles and attire, and under favorable circumstances even to wear men's clothes and to impose as such ... In this case, we are dealing with women who possess of the female qualities only the genital organs; in feelings, thought, commerce, and in external appearance they seem thoroughly male.

(Kraft-Ebing, 1984, p.302 cited in Rosario, 1996, p.400)

³³ Very recent transgender writings begin to make the links between inversion and transsexuality. For example, Prosser (1998) writes that "among the case histories of sexual inverts, we find our first transsexual narratives" (p.10).

Sexologists of Kraft-Ebing's era described "homosexuality" in a way that resonates with aspects of contemporary transsexuality. However, subsequently, in the process of defining and developing diagnostic criteria for transsexuality the relationship between gender crossing and homosexuality changed enormously. In order to justify the description of transsexuality as a psychiatric condition, and in order to justify SRS, transsexuality came to be defined in opposition to - in exclusion of - homosexuality.

By defining transsexuality and homosexuality as mutually exclusive, psycho-medical professionals who work with transsexuals attempted to divorce "gender identity" from sexuality.³⁴ According to this logic, homosexuality relates to sexuality and transsexuality relates to "gender identity". Therefore, transsexuality does not have to carry the stigma of queer sexual relations, and sex reassignment supposedly reinstates normative heterosexual relations. Here, it is assumed that a person wishing to transsex would be heterosexual post-transition and is therefore crossing *from* a "homosexual" situation. This leads to the often repeated idea that transsexuality is a case of homosexual denial. Rosario (1996) points out that early authors who attempted to explain transsexuality as a denial of homosexual desires effectively closed off the conceptual possibility of post-transition homosexuality, thus cutting short any theorising that could account for it. He suggests that the invert has been regarded by sexologists and psychiatrists as "the genealogical ancestor of the modern homosexual" (p.40), thus overlooking conceptual connections between "inversion" and "transsexuality" as concepts.

Clinicians were able to validate the classification of, and diagnostic criteria for, transsexuality by working within a framework that clearly differentiated "true

³⁴ Stoller (1971), a prominent theorist and clinician who worked on developing diagnostic criteria for transsexuality, regarded homosexuality and transsexuality as mutually exclusive. Pauly, one of the few psycho-medical researchers to focus extensively on FTM transsexuality, stated uncategorically that all FTM's are post-transitionally attracted to women (1974a, p.502), and that to confuse questions of homosexuality with transsexuality would be a mistake. However accurate the latter statement may be, in this context it effectively closes down discussion about the complex relationship between (trans)gender(ism) and (homo)sexuality.

transsexuals” from transvestites and homosexuals. It is important to realise here that the inclusion of transsexuality in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual for Mental Disorders (DSM) happened simultaneously with the withdrawal of homosexuality from the DSM.³⁵ This was the time when, after decades of trying to “cure” homosexuality, and after fierce protest from gay, lesbian and bisexual political groups, clinicians were forced to acknowledge that homosexuality per se was not grounds for a psychiatric diagnosis. In order to justify the entry of transsexuality into the DSM, it was important that transsexuality and homosexuality be clearly distinguished from one another. This was particularly important in view of the fact that transsexuality had often been (mis)conceived as a denial of homosexual desires. Divorcing transsexuality from homosexuality, and arguing for the psychiatric classification of transsexuality, were crucial steps in the rationalisation, and ethical justification, of SRS.

Rosario (1996) argues that not only has transsexuality been defined in such a way as to exclude the possibility of homosexuality, but that transsexual or cross-gendered characteristics are also renounced as having nothing to do with “healthy” homosexual ways of being. The conservative homosexual stance that defines itself through the exclusion of the effeminate male and the mannish lesbian is a feature of contemporary homosexual cultures. This stance is complicit with psycho-medical attempts to define transsexuality and homosexuality in separate simplicity: a separation that is important for the defence of medical practitioners accused of complying with perverse (and possibly psychotic) desires through the so-called “treatment” of transsexuality.

Rosario (1996) is critical of psycho-medical professionals’ tardiness in recognising the overlaps between homosexualities and transsexualities, arguing that:

The early sexological erasure of transsexualism and its subsequent slippage into homosexuality and transvestitism have in common a certain hetero-hegemonic logic: that the ‘sexual psychopath,’ through psychic

³⁵ In January 1974, the Board of Trustees of the American Psychological Association (APA) voted to delete homosexuality as a mental disorder from the DSM (Friedman, Green, and Spitzer, 1976).

and / or somatic gender 'delusions,' attempts to restore the 'normal' heterosexual pairing. The inability to overcome this model has contributed to the delayed professional and social recognition of transsexualism, particularly the double 'inversion' of FTGMs ... [For some] this has caused a great deal of suffering and psychiatric mismanagement.

(Rosario, 1996, p.43)

“FTGM” (Female-to-Gay-Male or Female-to-Gay-Man) is one example of the kind of terminology evolving through attempts to remedy the elision of (homo)sexuality within conceptions of transsexuality. This terminology is associated with some transsexuals’ response to recent (DSM IIR and DSM IV) psychiatric classifications of transsexuality and will be discussed further in that context.

Transsexuality as Distinct from “Sexual Deviance”

The legitimization, rationalisation, and commodification of sex-change operations have produced an identity category - transsexual - for a diverse group of sexual deviants and victims of severe gender role distress.

(Billings and Urban, 1982, p.266)

In the latter half of the twentieth century, it has been important to divorce transsexuality from the (homo)erotic. This has been useful for psycho-medical professionals, seeking to classify and “diagnose” transsexuality reliably, and is important for transsexuals who seek the validation of a psycho-medical classification which differentiates them from “sexual deviants”.

Working within a framework that clearly differentiated “true transsexuals” from transvestites and homosexuals enabled clinicians to validate the classification of, and

diagnostic criteria for, transsexuality: a crucial step in the rationalisation of SRS. Not only did this mean that “homosexuality” and “transsexuality” parted ways, but it set the scene for MTF and FTM transsexualities being conceptualised as separate but similar entities. MTF transsexuality was “identified as a point on a clinical continuum along with effeminate homosexuality and transvestism” (Billings and Urban, 1982, p.270; Beitel, 1985; Stoller, 1968). The lack of a concept of “female transvestism” made it considerably more difficult to identify “female transsexuals” according to some clinicians.³⁶

For some psycho-medical professionals, a central criterion for recognising a “true transsexual” was “[a] disdain or repugnance for homosexuals’ behavior” (Fisk, 1973, p.8). Even more shocking is Billings and Urban’s report that: “[o]ne physician who had performed approximately 100 sex-change operations in private practice told us that he diagnosed male-to-female transsexuals by bullying them. ‘The “girls” cry; the gays get aggressive.’” (Billings and Urban, 1982, p.275). It is easy to see how some clinicians’ eagerness to differentiate between homosexuality and transsexuality obscured any possible coincidence of the two.

Any discussion of the relationship between transsexuality and homosexuality in psycho-medical literatures necessarily encounters the terminological struggle (particularly within the 1970’s and 1980’s) around what constitutes a “homosexual” relationship when one party is transsexual.³⁷ In discussing the sexual preferences of FTM transsexuals, Ira Pauly (1974) uses the term “homosexual” to refer to a sexual relationship between a FTM and a (genetic) woman. The relationship is *homosexual* in so far as the two parties possess the same chromosomal sex. This is consistent with

³⁶ Billings and Urban’s footnote (1982, p.270) identifies exceptions to this.

³⁷ See Steiner (1985, p.6) for a succinct statement about the terminological confusion that has come about through clinicians’ attempts to write about transsexuals’ erotic attractions. Steiner’s response to this issue is important in that it acknowledges the possibility of MTFs’ post-transitional lesbianism.

DSM IIIR terminology, but is counter-intuitive. It is also unlikely to coincide with the way that transsexual people describe their own relationships.

Pauly asserts unquestioningly that

all female transsexuals are homosexual, in that these biological females who psychologically reject their femaleness and assume a masculine role are interested in and ... become involved with females as sexual partners ... But they are all heterogenderal, in that they have always considered themselves to be masculine, if not male.

(Pauly, 1974a, p.502)

Having asserted that FTM's are all "homosexual," to maintain the accepted distance between homoerotic relations and transsexuality, Pauly then goes on to explain how FTM's differ from lesbians. This is at least as interesting for the assumptions it makes about lesbians, as for its construction of (FTM) transsexuality. By way of differentiating lesbians from FTM transsexuals, Pauly writes:

The lesbian engages in a variety of sexual activities and rarely, if ever, does she abstain or exclusively play the role of the arouser. In the usual female homosexual relationship, roles are often varied, and it is the sexual motive that is clearly more important than the gender motive ... the lesbian would never request that her breasts or genitalia be removed surgically, any more than the heterosexual individual would permit this.

(Pauly, 1974a, p.504)

Thus, Pauly demonstrates the complete obscuring of any possible overlap between transsexuality and homosexuality. First, it is assumed that a clear comparison can be made between "lesbians" and "transsexuals": as though these are two discrete, knowable and mutually exclusive social groups. Second, it is assumed that the motive for any sexual relationship can be clearly known as either the affirmation of one's "gender", or a "sexual motive". Third, it is stated that neither lesbians nor

heterosexuals would consider surgical alteration of their sexual anatomy. Hence, the possibility of either lesbians or heterosexuals being transsexual is effectively erased!

Not only has it been important for psycho-medical professionals to maintain the conceptual distance between transsexuality and homosexuality, but some transsexuals are also invested in this aspect of the construction of transsexuality. There is some evidence that FTM transsexuals are more likely than MTF transsexuals to distance themselves from homosexual identities. In their research on gay and bisexual FTM's, Coleman, Bockting and Gooren (1993) report that among "other female-to-male transsexuals ... the topic of homosexuality seemed to be taboo [and t]here was a general lack of acceptance [of homosexuality] by other female-to-male transsexuals, most of whom were strongly conforming to the traditional masculine, heterosexual role." (p.44). I suggest that many transsexuals are strongly invested in maintaining conceptual distance between transsexuality and homosexuality.

For some transsexuals, however, heterosexist assumptions about transsexuals are cause for great concern. Resistance to the supposed mutual exclusivity of homosexuality and transsexuality comes from those transsexuals who wish to remain with the same partner before and after transition, transsexuals who wish to identify post-transitionally as gay, lesbian or bisexual, and transsexuals who do not want to adjust their personal histories in order to comply with diagnostic criteria.

Nataf, in a publication specifically discussing the relationship between lesbianism and transsexuality, highlights some of these issues. Regarding the legal situation in the U.K. (among other places), Nataf writes that if "a person seeking SRS is married, gender programmes require a divorce before recommending genital surgery and a change of civil status, where that is permitted. In most places such a marriage cannot be legally maintained" (Nataf, 1996, p.12). This gives us an example of how psycho-medical models encourage transsexuals to maintain a heteronormative mode of sexual interactions. But this is not all. It appears, from many transsexuals' reports that it is safer not only to deny any intentions for post-transitional homosexuality, but to deny erotic feelings altogether. This comes from early texts on transsexuality where it was assumed that true transsexuals were not interested in the erotic. On this point, Nataf

writes that “[l]earning the script for the gender identity clinics from the case studies in Harry Benjamin’s textbook on transsexualism, the absence of reference to sexuality and an erotic sense of the body perpetuates a myth of low sex drive and sexual dysfunction.” (Nataf, 1996, p.25). Nataf quotes one lesbian identified MTF transsexual as saying that “[a]t least one psychiatrist said, ‘If you’ve enjoyed sex at all that means you’re not transsexual. Because you’d be absolutely horrified at the idea of actually doing anything with your body.’ So I was just completely confused.” (Nataf, 1996, p.25).

This refusal of transsexuals’ sexuality may have its origins in clinicians’ fears about performing surgery on organically healthy genitalia.³⁸ This is obviously a thorny ethical issue. But if the person seeking surgery claims to have never been very interested in sexual activity, then perhaps surgery appears more easily justified. Conversely, if the person seeking surgery explicitly states that their surgically constructed genitalia will be used for homosexual practices, this might provide just enough doubt in the clinician’s mind to refuse or delay surgery.

Not all clinicians conform to the picture Nataf paints, and many transsexuals are not critical of the limitations placed on their sexuality within the clinical context. One of the workshop participants in this research, Kal, mentioned being uncertain about the relationship between his/her sexual feelings and transgender identity. Kal found that other transsexuals were saying: “don’t use your penis! It’s ugly, it’s awful, it’s not what you should have”, which left Kal with the sense that s/he was not supposed to enjoy genital contact at all. Kal described how in response to this, “I actually got really upset about it and I had to write to my specialist and say ‘does this mean I don’t want to be a transgendered person if I touch my penis or testicles?’ and he [replied] ‘no!’”. Luckily, Kal’s medical practitioner contradicted the assertion that transsexual people ought to be disinterested in or repulsed by their birth genitalia and encouraged Kal to accept his/her body as it is, while living as transgendered. Kal said that this “made me feel more confident that what I am is fine, I don’t have to be a particular way”. Despite

³⁸ For instance, see Laub and Fisk’s (1974) article which questions the ethics of “genital amputation and castration” (p.388).

some medical practitioners' exhibiting the responses of Kal's doctor, by far the most pervasive understanding of transsexuals' erotic feelings within psycho-medical literatures portrays transsexuals as asexual and/or post-transitionally heterosexual.

Historically, it has been important to divorce transsexuality from the erotic. This has been important to psycho-medical professionals for arguing against the criticism that they are colluding with psychosis or sexual perversity (suggestions which I take up further in Chapter Seven). It has also been important for transsexuals who have wanted the validation of psycho-medical classification which differentiates them from "sexual deviants". However, the construction of transsexuality and homosexuality as mutually exclusive (i.e., the regulation of transsexuals' sexuality) is not supported by some transsexual and transgendered people, especially those who identify as gay, lesbian or bisexual. Indeed, in a most recent transgender publication, Prosser claims that in "the new discourse of transgender ... homosexuality and transgender, lesbian and transsexual become significantly reentangled" (1998, p.11). Such reentangling responds directly to the concerns of Nataf, amongst others.

Psychiatric Nomenclature and Classification

López argues that the regulatory practices employed in gender identity clinics '*effectively silence* ambiguities and doubts about gender and sexuality, multiple gender positions, biographies, and desires ...'

(López, 1996, p.170)

Even in countries, such as Aotearoa / New Zealand, where transsexuality is not regulated through gender identity clinics, the regulatory practices described by López still occur. One of the ways such regulation can be maintained on an international scale is through the use of standardised systems of classification and nomenclature.

Psycho-medical approaches to transsexuality rely on classification systems which are continually being revised and up-dated. On one level, this implies an awareness of the importance of language for constructing gender and sexual identities. Yet, on another level, the way in which language is “used” in the process of classification, and the weight that those classifications can have once they have been decided upon, effectively denies that reframing diagnostic criteria is a process of discursive construction. The medico-scientific framing of Gender Identity Disorder (as “transsexuality” is currently called in the DSM IV) implies that what is being settled on is not simply a contemporary construction of gender, but the “truth” about a clinically validated “disorder”. In this chapter, I trace the various DSM editions to show the changes in language which accompany particular perspectives on transsexuality (and its relationship with erotic attraction). I also signal instances where these changes in classification, and in language, occur in the context of political struggles among mental health practitioners and gaylesbitrans people (although these struggles are obscured within the DSM).

The DSM constructs “disordered others” without acknowledging that it simultaneously constructs and validates the professional identity of those who use it as a diagnostic tool. Furthermore, behind the scenes arguments rage as to whether and how transsexuals ought to be classified within a psychiatric manual, and where the boundaries lie between one diagnosis and another. On the surface of the text, Gender Identity Disorders are calmly and unambiguously laid out, with simple specifications relating to “sexual orientation”. The message is clear: there are two sexes, four possible configurations for sexual attraction, and anyone who cannot be slotted within the resulting system is psychiatrically disordered and may require psycho-medical treatment.

The Diagnostic and Statistical Manuals for Mental Disorders have evolved out of the American Psychiatric Association’s attempts to develop and maintain a system of psychiatric classification and nomenclature to be used throughout North America. Since the first Diagnostic and Statistical Manual for Mental Disorders (DSM I), published in 1952, the use and impact of the DSM’s have reached far beyond North American contexts. Not only has the DSM played a role in exporting North American

concepts of mental illness to other parts of the world, but it has been instrumental in the development of psychiatry as an independent medical specialty. Links between psychiatry and other branches of medicine are maintained partly through co-operative development between the International Classification of Diseases (ICD) and the DSM. The third DSM formed the basis for diagnostic criteria which were translated into thirteen other (European and Asian) languages and the revised edition which soon followed (DSM IIIR) carried a cautionary note about the possible risks of using DSM classifications unthinkingly in cross-cultural contexts. Nevertheless, throughout more than four decades of work on DSM's, a basic tenet seems to have remained: this is a classification system which is universally applicable and is founded on "knowledge" obtained through "objective" research.

In 1968, the authors of the Foreword of the DSM II (1968) claim that it reflects "the growth of the concept that the people of all nations live in one world" (p.vii), such was the belief that it was possible to describe mental illness in universally applicable terms. In choosing appropriate language for the system of nomenclature, the authors also claim to have "tried to avoid terms which carry with them *implications*" (p.viii) of the nature or cause of any disorder and to "select terms which ... would least bind the judgment of the user" (p.viii). Do the authors hope that the term "sexual deviant" could be assigned to someone without carrying any "implications" for either the psychiatrist or the "sexual deviant" him/herself? And who is the "user" whose judgment is supposed not to be bound by such a term as "sexual deviant": the clinician, or the client? The authors also give examples of disorders that have been re-labelled, emphasising the view that the "change of label has not changed the nature of the disorder" (p.ix). This claim becomes particularly interesting in the context of sexuality and gender identity disorders which have undergone considerable changes in naming and classification through the various DSM editions. This comment raises the question of whether the "nature of the disorder" changes as the "disorder" not only takes on a new name, but effectively slips in or out of the DSM altogether, as aspects of sexuality and gender identity disorders have. The failure to address such questions is consistent with the authors' assumption that "disorders" can be discerned and diagnosed objectively, without the influence of social, linguistic, or political factors. Thus, the

DSM works from an empiricist ontological base whereby its own function in the regulatory regime of naming is ignored.

(Trans)Sexuality in The Diagnostic and Statistical Manuals

In the DSM I (1952) there is a single category for “Sexual Deviation” (pp.38-39). This comes under the broader heading of “Sociopathic Personality Disorders” and incorporates “homosexuality, transvestism, pedophilia, fetishism and sexual sadism” (p.39). Transsexuality does not feature in this edition of the DSM.

In the DSM II (1968) “Sexual Deviations” once again come under the heading of “Personality Disorders” and describe a range of “individuals whose sexual interests are directed primarily towards objects other than people of the opposite sex, ... and sexual acts not usually associated with coitus” (p.44). This time, the category carries the qualifier: “This diagnosis is not appropriate for individuals who perform deviant sexual acts because normal sexual objects are not available to them.” (p.44). Once again, homosexuality and transvestism are listed but there is no mention of transsexuality.

The DSM III (1980) is far more thorough and weighty than its predecessors. It was in this edition that specific diagnostic criteria were introduced to the DSM for the first time. The authors of the DSM III attempt to defend their definition of diagnostic categories as mental disorders, stating clearly that social deviance alone does not constitute mental disorder. Mental disorders listed in the DSM III are regarded as disorders in so far as they cause distress or impairment which is not solely a result of “conflict between an individual and society” (1980, p.6). This point becomes particularly important for discussions around homosexuality and childhood gender identity disorder, as we will soon see. The authors are also careful to remind the reader that the DSM III describes “disorders that individuals have” (p.6) rather than classifying individuals themselves. This claim becomes even more interesting in the light of the 1994 publication of the “Study Guide to DSM-IV” which states: “The diagnoses in DSM-IV ... are like ready-made suits that come in a variety of standard styles and sizes. They fit many patients well, others adequately, and some barely at all.

The clinician's task, like the clothier's, is to fit individuals with specific characteristics into standard, predefined categories." (Fauman, 1994, p.1). It appears that, despite some DSM contributors' best intentions, DSM terms are used to *classify individuals*, not merely to describe their "disorders".

The authors of the DSM III (1980) attempt to cover themselves with regard to future changes to the DSM (implicitly denying any possible political motivations for change) by writing that "this final version of DSM III is only one still frame in the ongoing process of attempting to better understand mental disorders" (1980, p.12). The authors go into further detail to justify changes with specific regard to the classification of "homosexuality". Appendix C tells us that, in 1973 the American Psychological Association (APA) board of trustees voted to remove "homosexuality" from the DSM and replace it with "sexual orientation disturbance". By the time the DSM III was published, this nomenclature had further changed to "ego-dystonic homosexuality". The idea here is that homosexuality per se is not a mental disorder under the criteria of distress or disability, but that some homosexual people, who are sufficiently unhappy about their sexuality to want to change it, may come into this classification. One effect of this DSM's framing of homosexuality, and of the process of classification per se, is that the ever-changing classifications of homosexuality and transsexuality are protected from scrutiny, their political motivations swept carefully aside.

In the DSM III (1980), sexual anatomy, gender identity, and gender role are defined in relation to one another. This is done in such a way as to leave no doubt in the reader's mind of the certainty and absoluteness of these concepts (a point I critique in Chapter Seven). Here, "gender identity" becomes a discrete and knowable entity which may be expressed through "everything that one says and does, including sexual arousal" (p.261). How one is actually supposed to express one's "gender identity" through sexual arousal is not made clear. Nor is there any consideration of how this might be different if there is, as in the case of transsexuality, "an incongruence between anatomic sex and gender identity" (p.261).

The terminology of “Gender Identity Disorders” (GID) appears for the first time in the DSM III. Within the umbrella category of gender identity disorders falls “transsexualism” and “gender identity disorder of childhood”. As before, transvestism is classified separately, though the umbrella term for this classification has now changed from “sexual deviations” to “paraphilias”.

In the description of gender identity disorder of childhood, it is stated that “[s]ome children refuse to attend school because of teasing or pressure to dress in attire stereotypical of their sex. Most children with this disorder deny being disturbed by it except as it brings them into conflict with the expectations of their family or peers.” (p.264). Having acknowledged this, how can the DSM III justifiably classify GID (Gender Identity Disorder) of childhood as a mental disorder which is, in and of itself, a source of disturbance, impairment or disability and where that disturbance is not the result of conflict between the individual and society? It seems conceivable that GID of childhood is only a disturbance in so far as family and peers’ expectations of the child in question cause conflict.

The DSM IIR (1987) provides the most thorough description of sexuality and gender identity “disorders” so far. By now the space given to homosexuality and transvestism is tiny in comparison with the eight pages devoted to aspects of gender-crossing deemed to relate to “gender identity” rather than anything “sexual”. This division occurs not only in naming: more than two hundred pages now separate “sexual” disorders from “gender identity” disorders. Homosexuality per se is not deemed classifiable, however “persistent and marked distress about one’s sexual orientation” (p.296) may, as in the DSM III, be classified as a sexual disorder. Cross-dressing in itself does not constitute a sexual disorder, however it may be a feature of either (MTF) “transsexualism” or “transvestic fetishism.” One of the distinctions between these two diagnostic categories is that cross-dressing may induce sexual arousal in the latter case but not in the former. This provides an example of how transsexuality is defined so as to exclude the erotic. In terms of “sexual orientation” transsexuals are supposed to fit into four categories for diagnostic purposes: asexual, homosexual, heterosexual, or unspecified. Here, “homosexual” and “heterosexual” refer to

chromosomal sex and therefore may not reflect the transsexual person's own understanding of their sexual relationships.

Recent sexological research, whilst working within the general scientific paradigm and linguistic framework of psycho-medical disciplines, brings into question assumptions which underpin psycho-medical approaches to the relationship between sexual attraction and transsexuality. For example, in Coleman, Bockting, and Gooren's paper titled: "Homosexual and Bisexual Identity in Sex-Reassigned Female-to-Male Transsexuals," they state that "[r]egarding female gender dysphoric individuals, our findings challenge the issue of using sexual orientation in classification systems of gender dysphoria syndromes and as a risk factor in the decision regarding sex reassignment. Further, our study invites us to rethink the genital criterion in the assessment of sexual orientation." (1993, p.37)

As Coleman et al (1993) point out, a FTM transsexual who has relationships with men and identifies as gay would have been classified as "heterosexual" under the system suggested in the DSM IIIR, since biological sex rather than lived gender is used as a reference point for determining the sexuality classification. Various researchers have tackled this problem of classifying transsexuals' sexual identity, each arriving at different systems of classification. Pauly (1974) suggested the terms "homogenderal" and "heterogenderal" to refer respectively to transsexuals who choose partners of the same or different lived genders. Clare and Tully (1989) used the term "transhomosexual" to refer to transsexuals who are "gay" or "lesbian" post-transition. DSM IV attempts to respond to this issue by avoiding any form of "hetero" and "homo" labels in the sexual orientation classification.

With the publication of the DSM IV (1994) came transitions which are significant but more subtle than those seen previously. Here, "Sexual and Gender Identity Disorders" are drawn back together under one heading. Issues of "sexual orientation" are dealt with more carefully. Transsexuals are no longer described as "heterosexual" or "homosexual", but may be classified according to the four terms: "sexually attracted to males, sexually attracted to females, sexually attracted to both, sexually attracted to neither" (p.538). Through this statement we see the persistence of the assumption that

people can be categorised simply by “sex”, and that there are only two sexes. Also, the apparently liberal concession to make each “sexual orientation” subcategory appear equally weighted, effectively renders invisible post-transitional gay, bisexual or lesbian identities. That is, this DSM nomenclature makes it look as though it means nothing different for a FTM compared with a MTF transsexual to be “sexually attracted to men”. (Hence Rosario’s earlier suggestion of the term FTGM for highlighting some FTMs’ identification as gay men.)

Although the DSM IV describes gender identity disorders so that the question of sexual preference is left open, this is not necessarily the case with other recent psychiatric texts. For example, the Oxford Textbook of Psychiatry (1996) describes FTM transsexuality in the following terms:

Many women who appear to be transsexuals are really homosexuals. Transsexual women resemble transsexual men in having held since childhood a strong conviction that they ‘occupy’ a body of the wrong sex. ... Transsexual women strive to be like men in dress, voice, gestures, and social behaviour, and in their choice of work and hobbies. They wish to have intercourse not with a female homosexual, but in the role of male with a heterosexual woman.

(Gelder, Gath, Mayon, and Cowen, 1996, p.507)

Thus, a variation on the myth of former decades: that transsexuals are really homosexuals in denial; resurfaces in a text published two years after the DSM IV.

The DSM IV itself is not devoid of questionable references to transsexuals’ sexual identity. Once again, this is couched in terms that bring the meaning of “lesbianism” into question at least as much as the meaning of transsexuality. The DSM IV states:

The sexual activity of [Adults with Gender Identity Disorder] with same-sex partners is generally constrained by the preference that their partners neither see nor touch their genitals. For some males who present later in life, (often following marriage), sexual activity with a woman is

accompanied by the fantasy of being lesbian lovers or that his partner is a man and he is a woman.

(DSM IV, 1994, pp.533-534)³⁹

In this description of some MTF transsexuals' sexual relationships, the assumption is clear: the transsexual is never "really" a lesbian, but can only be so in fantasy.

Recent psycho-medical publications, like earlier texts, reinforce the assumption that what transsexuality is can be known and described in modernist, clinical, behaviourist terms. There is acknowledgment that the terms used may change over time, and that there needs to be more research on transsexual sexuality, but the uncritical epistemological approach persists. This persists even in the face of overt challenges from transgender people: challenges which highlight the political nature of the psychiatric classification of transsexuality and the great diversity of transgender ways of being: diversity which could not possibly (and should not) be encapsulated within a simplistic set of diagnostic criteria.

Gender Identity Disorders of Childhood

While the DSM IIR contained separate classifications for and descriptions of "Gender Identity Disorder of Childhood", "Transsexualism", and a "Nontranssexual Type" of Gender Identity Disorder, within the DSM IV, these groups seem to have slid together. The terms "gender dysphoria", "transvestism", and "transsexualism" have almost completely disappeared. The former two are mentioned only briefly in relation to differential diagnoses. What remains is a single set of diagnostic criteria titled: Gender Identity Disorder, split into one sub-category for children and another for adolescents and adults. On the surface, this may seem a benign and reasonable move. However, it has drawn some concern from transsexual, transgendered and gay people (Wilson, 1997).

³⁹ Here, "same-sex partner" means an MTF with a male partner or an FTM with a female partner; and "males" refers to MTF transsexuals.

The focus on gender identity disorders of childhood has been driven by clinicians and researchers who perceive that, where transsexuality is concerned, prevention is far more effective than “treatment”. Research and clinical work with children who exhibit cross-gendered tendencies may come under the well-intentioned guise of preventing transsexuality, but has been the source of considerable concern. The category, gender identity disorder in children, by aiming at a patient-group which is (almost?) entirely silent (in terms of challenging psycho-medical discourses), institutes a “disorder” relating to sexuality and gender, where the least direct resistance is likely to be met. Furthermore, this “disorder” targets another potentially highly compliant client group: over anxious parents (who are terrified that their children might grow up to be gay).

Psycho-medical professionals, aware of the resistance from vocal gay and transsexual groups, are quick to reassure readers that:

Gender Identity Disorder ... is not meant to describe a child's nonconformity to stereotypic sex-role behaviour as, for example, in 'tomboyishness' in girls or 'sissyish' behaviour in boys. Rather, it represents a profound disturbance of the individual's sense of identity with regard to maleness or femaleness. Behaviour in children that merely does not fit the cultural stereotype of masculinity or femininity should not be given the diagnosis unless the full syndrome is present, including marked distress or impairment.

(DSM IV, 1994, p.536)

How is the boundary between merely deviating from a stereotype and being “profoundly disturbed” to be determined? What kind of “impairment” might result from childhood gender-crossing? How can this be validated as a mental disorder, when the “marked distress or impairment” could well result not from the “disorder” itself but from the horror and disapproval of (homophobic / transphobic) parents, teachers, and peers?

That parental concern is a most important factor in the presentation and diagnosis of children with this “disorder” is evident in the comment that for “clinically referred children, onset of cross-gender interests and activities is usually between ages 2 and 4 years ... Typically children are referred around the time of school entry because of parental concern that what they regarded as a ‘phase’ does not appear to be passing.” (DSM IV, 1994, p.536). To what extent are psychologists responding to the presence of a childhood “disorder”, and to what extent are they reacting to (fee paying) parents’ concerns?

Not only is childhood gender identity disorder a concern for parents, clinicians and politically astute transsexuals, but it has drawn the attention of gay activists concerned that this is merely a way of sneaking “homosexuality” back into the DSM. To what extent is this “disorder” “treated” in the name of preventing transsexuality; and to what extent is it an attempt to pathologise homosexuality? The DSM IV states:

By late adolescence or adulthood, about three-quarters of boys who had a childhood history of Gender Identity Disorder report a homosexual or bisexual orientation, but without concurrent Gender Identity Disorder. Most of the remainder report a heterosexual orientation, also without concurrent Gender Identity Disorder. The corresponding percentages for sexual orientation in girls are not known.

(DSM IV, 1994, p.536)

Or, put more bluntly: “studies have shown that effeminate boys more often grow up as homosexuals than as transsexuals” (Gelder et al, 1996, 507). This raises questions about precisely which adulthood “disorder” is being prevented through the “treatment” of childhood gender identity disorder: homosexuality or transsexuality.

Discussions of childhood gender identity disorder raise, yet again, questions about the relationship between MTF and FTM transsexuality. Although, strictly speaking, gender identity disorders are described as relating to both “males” and “females”, the research in this area tends to focus on MTF scenarios. Pauly, who attempts to redress this situation comments that “effeminate” males often have greater problems than their

female counterparts. Curiously, he seems surprised by the way these problems persist from childhood into adulthood. He writes that “effeminate boys are ridiculed by their peers, and usually admonished by their parents, and *despite* this negative social reinforcement they tend to have more frequent and serious gender identity problems as adults than do their female counterparts” (1974, p.496, emphasis mine). My emphasis on Pauly’s “despite” is intended to highlight the disjuncture between psycho-medical responses to childhood gender identity disorder and the lived realities of people who experience some form of gender-transition. Because of Pauly’s hegemonic beliefs about “gender identity” and his behaviourist assumptions, he implies that “negative social reinforcement” might be expected to steer an “effeminate boy” away from later “gender identity problems”. The lived reality for such boys, however, is surely in contrast to Pauly’s inferences in that early experiences of being ridiculed do not simply nudge a young person “onto the right path”, as though there is some pre-destined gender-path awaiting them. Nevertheless, Pauly’s comments do reflect the theoretical underpinning of clinical practice in this area. Research on possible ways of treating boys with childhood gender identity disorder includes using therapeutic methods where the boys are positively reinforced for stereotypic masculine behaviour.⁴⁰ I have not been able to access information about “treatments” for girls with childhood gender identity disorder as treating girls for gender identity disorder is far less common and less well documented.⁴¹

With the construction of childhood gender identity disorder, the curious dance enacted by transsexuality and homosexuality within psycho-medical literatures takes another turn. Although found alongside adult transsexuality, this diagnostic category represents psycho-medical professionals’ on-going quest to “cure” homosexuality (albeit, in the guise of trying to prevent transsexuality). The assumption that behavioural methods might somehow “correct” early “gender identity problems”

⁴⁰ For a transgender critique of the so-called “sissy-boy” research and clinical programmes, see MacKenzie (1994, pp.90-98).

⁴¹ See Wilson (1997) for a critique of the discrepancy between boys’ and girls’ treatment for GID.

provides one of many illustrations of the ontologising of gender identity, which form the basis for the ontologising of transsexuality. Reading between the lines of psycho-medical texts on childhood gender identity disorder tells a familiar story of two genders, of children who mistakenly take off on the “wrong” gender path, and of reinforcement schedules designed to nudge them back to the “right” path. This is the same story that enables “transsexuality” to come into being - to make sense - and to be maintained as a social category which subsequently bears the stigma of “abnormality” in a social context where there is assumed to be a normal (read: right) way to be gendered and an abnormal (read: wrong) way to be gendered.

Questioning Classification

The diagnosis of any “transsexual” person is, according to Billings and Urban, *‘a subtle negotiation process between patients and physicians, in which the patients’ troubles are defined, legitimated, and regulated as illness’* (Billings and Urban, 1982, p.275). Billings and Urban give examples of the way the interviews for the assessment of SRS candidates are part of the socialisation process whereby transsexuals learn to give the “right” answers. They illustrate their point with the following dialogue:

‘Physician: “You said you always felt like a girl - what is that?”

Patient: [long pause] “I don’t know.”

Physician: “Sexual attraction? Played with girls’ toys?”’

(Billings and Urban, 1982, p.275)

Researchers of transsexuality have, for some time, relied on the stories of those uneasy about their gender identification while simultaneously questioning the authenticity of transsexuals’ self reports. Kubie and Mackie’s (1968) articulation of this problem virtually questions the validity of the classification of transsexuality. As these authors

were writing in the 1970's, they were using the language of "transsexualism", rather than "gender identity disorder". I suggest that the subsequent change in language has not erased the concerns expressed here. Kubie and Mackie (1968, p.347) write:

Since the diagnosis of 'trans-sexualism' hinges in part at least on an accurate assessment of the authenticity of the patient's self-description and history, reported studies of 'trans-sexualism' frequently bog down at this starting point. There is no indication of the extent to which the patient's stories and self-description can be trusted ... The reports usually take the 'trans-sexuality' for granted and concern themselves with fragmentary and diverse demographic information of assumed 'trans-sexuals'.

If a valid classification of a particular person as "transsexual" relies upon that person's self-description, and if that self-description always risks lacking "accuracy" or "authenticity," then on what grounds can a "diagnosis" of transsexuality ever be attained? Seeking authenticity in patients' self-descriptions operates within a modernist discourse of truth and knowledge. Psycho-medical research on transsexuality tends to lie uncritically within this discourse. Yet, as Kubie and Mackie imply (through their frequent use of inverted commas, at least), it is barely viable for psycho-medical work on transsexuality to maintain a truth-discourse. Nevertheless, attempting to work outside of that discursive framework, threatens the very infrastructure of psycho-medical knowledge production. Kubie and Mackie allow the classification of transsexuality to remain uncertain by presenting the words "trans-sexualism" and "trans-sexual" as perpetually hanging in inverted commas. They momentarily unsettle the very ground upon which psycho-medical research on transsexuality stands. Here, the ontologising of transsexuality is made apparent.

Rather than allowing this acknowledged uncertainty to threaten the grounds of his research, Pauly (1974) defends the process whereby psycho-medical professionals are assumed to be able to accurately classify a "patient" as transsexual or otherwise. He reminds the reader: "we must not assume that all who request change of sex operations are true transsexuals" (Pauly, 1974, p.490), thus alluding to the psycho-

medical professionals' powers to decide which of the self-described "transsexuals" are "true transsexuals". He then draws attention away from the specific concerns of reliably diagnosing transsexuality, by pointing out that "[p]sychiatrists are used to dealing with the question of reliability of their patients. They are aware of retrospective falsification and selectivity of recall... The content of what is said obviously needs interpretation and evaluation." (Pauly, 1974, p.491). Pauly glosses over the process by which transsexuals' stories are evaluated. Thus, the absolute power of the psychiatrist to determine what constitutes a "true" transsexual is unchallenged, and the possibility of questioning the classification system is foreclosed.

While researchers' questions about the validity and reliability of the psychiatric classification of transsexuality have gone some way to unsettling the DSM diagnostic criteria, the most fatal blow has surely come from transsexuals themselves. This challenge comes in the form of transsexuals' audacity in role-playing textbook cases of transsexuality, then admitting afterwards what they had done. Billings and Urban are two of many researchers to bring this issue to readers' attention. They report that "in follow-up conversations, some model patients admitted having shaped biographical accounts to exclude discrediting information, including homosexual and erotic, heterosexual pasts." (Billings and Urban, 1982, p.274).

Whilst this practice surely continues, there are also transsexuals who present even more direct resistance to psycho-medical definitions of transsexuality, sometimes to their own detriment. Nataf quotes a MTF lesbian ("Caroline") as saying:

I told them I am bisexual but I prefer women ... I don't think that that was particularly the best thing to say. I thought, 'Why in hell should I lie and present all the classic case history that I'm supposed to present?' I tried to be as honest as I could. Which probably wasn't the best policy. So it took a long time. I felt that I lost five years of my life.

(Nataf, quoting "Caroline", 1996, p.20)

Each of the foundation blocks upon which the psycho-medical classification of transsexuality has relied represents a possible point of resistance: a point at which the

foundation can begin to crack. One of these foundation stones concerns the modernist / behaviourist assumptions that such things as “mental disorders” and “gender identity” can be knowable, nameable, and therefore manipulable. Aspects of this assumption are addressed in Chapter Seven. Another important building block has been the definition of transsexuality via the exclusion of homosexuality and, to some extent, the erotic. As fissures develop in these various aspects of the psycho-medical construction of transsexuality, some researchers make more concerted attempts to “know”, rename, and thereby seek to manipulate (trans)sexualities.

Heterocentric Transsexualities

As researchers make further attempts to produce “knowledge” about transsexuality, so transsexuals themselves become more vocal and more articulate in their own constructions of transsexuality. However, given that psycho-medical constructions of transsexuals’ sexuality affect the clinical treatment of transsexuals seeking SRS, and given that those constructions appeal to popular understandings of both sexuality and “gender identity”, how much room is left for transsexuals to make sense of their own sexualities? What discursive avenues are there for transsexuals trying to construct their own experiences of sexual attraction?

It is not only psycho-medical discourse that is heterocentric; transsexuals’ talk about their own sexuality is sometimes cast in heterocentric terms too. This was demonstrated within the present research, however, there were significant differences between FTM and MTF participants’ deployment of heterocentric discourses.

Viewing transcript material with a critical eye to the role of heterosexism⁴² in the construction of transsexuality gives rise to some interesting observations. In the first

⁴² I refer to both “heterosexism” and “heterocentrism” in this chapter. As I employ these terms, they are not interchangeable, but there is only a shade of difference between them.

instance, these observations are interesting because they come out of parts of the interview where I was not asking about sexual attraction, but the interviewee started talking about their sexual feelings in the course of explaining their understanding of themselves as a wo/man. Exploring these aspects of the transcripts slightly more deeply reveals that, in fact, they almost all appear in the interviews with FTM transsexuals, not those with MTF's. Furthermore, the comments relating to heterosexist constructions of transsexuality tend to revolve around a statement along the lines of: "I'm not gay. I've always been attracted to girls / women. I am not a woman. Therefore I must be a transsexual / man." Each of the four FTM interviewees wove their ways through variations on this statement whereas this tended not to be a feature of the MTF interviewees' talk at all.

Of all the interviewees, Babe drew the most direct connection between his identity as a man and his sexual attraction towards women. In the course of the interview, he talked variously about his disinterest in sexual relationships with men, his attraction to women, and his non-identification with lesbians or gay people. For Babe, being a man means being a heterosexual man and having the anatomical features which allow one to function according to heterosexual norms in a relationship with a woman.

Without having initiated discussion on sexual attraction, I asked Babe what it meant to him to describe himself as a man. He had some difficulty answering this, so I turned the question around and asked: "what is there about not being a woman that appeals to you...?" to which he immediately replied:

Ever since I was a child I was really attracted to women. It's the thing that I grew up with ever since I was little, I was always attracted sexually to women and ... to be able to have a sexual relationship, therefore, I must have the attributes of a man. When you grow up you realize that ... you don't have the thing like other boys have. So you stand there and look

"Heterosexism" could be understood as the overarching set of understandings within which individuals' deployment of heterocentric discourses makes sense.

at yours and you look at them and you know there's something different there and yet you have these feelings with women and yet not towards other males.

So, for Babe, being attracted to girls / women seemed to foreclose the question of his identity as a man. He “knew” he was “really” a “man”, because he had always been attracted to girls / women. In terms of Babe’s assumption of heterosexuality, his comments may be seen as complicit with psycho-medical descriptions of transsexuals’ erotic attractions. However, he complicates the relationship between sexuality and gender identification by talking about them as interdependent. Throughout the interview, Babe elaborated on the theme of being attracted to women and not men through various comments, such as:

Before I had a change I had boyfriends. But I was never interested in them. They were good guys you know, they really were good guys, but I had always told them ‘No, I’m different. You don’t know me!’

In explanation of why he had sexual relationships with men, when he felt he was not attracted to them, he told me of a conversation with his sister:

I told my sister: ‘Look, I’m different, I know I’m different’ ... (this is before I had the change) ‘I’m more attracted towards women’, and then my sister said: ‘Oh, have you tried sleeping with a man to find out? How would you know if you really haven’t slept with a man?’ And I thought, ‘Oh, yeah. OK then.’ So I went out with some men but, you know, it’s just not me. I just know that I’m different. It’s not for me.

In talking about his pre-transition sexual experiences with women, he repeated two main themes: that he is not lesbian, and that he wants to have sexual relations with women where he plays a “male role”. Part of Babe’s process of dealing with the conflict between other’s perception of him as female and his sexual desires involved his use of alcohol. He describes:

When I had ... relationship[s] with women, before I had the change, that was really beautiful. But I was always drunk, because ... I never really s[aw] myself as a lesbian. ... I think partly ... I get drunk because I don't really know what to do with them and ... you get drunk so you don't really do much. So it was good, but I was mainly drunk and I didn't really know what was going on.

At another point in the interview, Babe said:

I just c[ould]n't accept it, I just didn't accept that I'm gay, I'm lesbian. I never s[aw] myself as [lesbian]. It's very very difficult, because before I had the change, I had this relationship with this woman, which really made me a lesbian, [because] I [hadn't had the] change, but in my mind - my thought pattern - no I wasn't [lesbian].

...

That's why I think ... I had to be drunk before I touched [a woman] - because I never s[aw] myself really as a lesbian or a gay person. And the idea really ... [it's] hard to say but it repulsed me. ... [At those] times that I made love, I'd just drink myself until I c[ould]n't really see what's happening.

This was the only time Babe alluded to lesbianism as repulsive. In other instances, he distanced himself from the possibility of identifying as lesbian in less emotive ways. In one instance, he said:

Transsexuals are quite different from drag queens, from transvestites, [and even] from gay people. Not that [I'm] trying to put them down, it [is] just that [we are] different. We just see ourselves totally different[ly].

Referring to himself more specifically, he described how he knew he was different from lesbians, saying: "I always knew that I [was] different. Not just a woman wanting to be with a woman but ... really wanting to be a man." So, for Babe, being a lesbian would involve taking pleasure in being a woman with another woman, whereas his

transsexual identity is organised around his pleasure in intimacy with women where he is a man.

He also talked about his experiences within lesbian communities: experiences of differentiating his own masculinity from a “butch lesbian” image, and experiences of being unwelcome within lesbian circles as someone who was questioning his identity as a woman. He said:

I've always been very tomboyish ... when I [went] through the change, it was nothing new to me to behave the way I do. I don't go to the extreme of really looking rough and looking muscular. ... I just [be] myself. ... When I was coming out ... I knew some lesbians ... some of [whom] really behaved butch. But they got to know that I was going through the change [and then] they didn't want to know me any more because they felt as though I'd betrayed them: the womanhood thing ... women standing together - lesbians standing together - things like that. They don't ... like a person going outside of that circle, being someone else. But then I look at them, a lot of them behave like men anyway: dress up like men, cut their hair like men, walk around like men, beat up their girlfriends.

Babe's description of his experiences within lesbian communities is echoed clearly in Halberstam's recent article on the relationship between FTM and butch masculinities. Halberstam writes that “[s]ome lesbians seem to see FTMs as traitors to a ‘women’s’ movement who cross over and become the enemy” (1998, p.287). The politics which enable FTMs to be read as “traitors” are fundamental to the “antagonism between lesbian and FTM subjectivities” (Halberstam, 1998, p.293). These politics also enable some lesbians to “erase FTMs by claiming transsexual males as lesbians who lack access to a liberating discourse” (Halberstam, 1998, p.293).

Babe forges his own gendered subjectivity through his understanding of himself as being attracted to women rather than men, and as being not-lesbian. The final statement, which enables Babe to conclude that he is more like “man” than like “lesbian” or “woman,” relates to how he seeks to have sexual relations with women. In

his words, in sexual relationship with women: “I just want to play the dominant role of male.” Babe explains this, saying:

When I was with women before ... [the change] I want[ed] to make love to them as a man. ... That's how I felt ... before I went through the change. I want[ed] to make love to them as a man. I never really wanted to let them touch me. ... I just don't like them touching me, until I touch them and I make the move.

It is consistent with Halberstam's (1998) observations that Babe's description of wanting to “make love to [women] as a man” resonates very closely with some depictions of butch/femme lesbian intimacy, yet he specifically distances himself from a lesbian identity. One might speculate that influences from Babe's religious and cultural context make it more possible for him to understand himself as being “really a man”, than as being lesbian. Unfortunately, such a suggestion runs dangerously close to the “transsexuality as homosexual denial” argument. This is not what I want to suggest. Rather, it is important to open up the question of the relationship between FTM and butch lesbian sexuality (as is discussed in more detail by Halberstam, 1998); a question which is merely foreclosed by the “transsexuality as homosexual denial” argument.⁴³

Once living as a man, Babe began a relationship with his current girlfriend. In this relationship, he said:

⁴³ Halberstam (1998) also cautions readers that “[w]hile a distinction between lesbian and FTM positions might be an important one to sketch out, there is always the danger that the effort to mark the territory of FTM subjectivity might fall into homophobic assertions about lesbians and sexist formulations of women in general” (p.297). This comment of Halberstam's relates to her research on transsexual autobiographical material. It also connects with aspects of the interview material which I have not focused on in this thesis, where FTM interviewees and their “heterosexual” women partners worked together to construct their relationship as heterosexual. There is an opening, here, for further research on the constructions of heterosexuality that are often actively maintained by FTMs and their women partners.

With my girlfriend, of course, I played the dominant role. But when we get to know each other, we change ... we are more relaxed with each other, so we do it together. [We are] more relaxed because I know that she loves me and I love her and that's an expression of love, whereas before it was always: 'Oh my god! ... and [I] didn't really know what to do.'

So, for Babe's understanding of himself as a heterosexual man, being able to have relationships with women who see him as a man and with whom he can take up a "dominant" role has been important. However, now that he is in a long-term relationship and is generally perceived as a man in his day-to-day life, it is not necessarily so important for him to play a dominant sexual role. Nevertheless, his conception of what it is to "be a man" does appear to hinge on heterosexual norms, as evidenced by his statement that: "to be a man you have to have all the physical characteristics of [a man] ... you've got to have the genital part of a man ... and you've got to function as a man." At the beginning of the interview, when Babe said this, I could not be certain that "functioning as a man" meant "functioning as a heterosexual man in a normative sexual relationship with a woman". After having considered Babe's other comments regarding sexuality, however, I think it would be fair to assume that heterosexuality is integral to Babe's conception of himself as a "man".

Interestingly, Babe's comments about the transition from playing a "dominant role" in sex, to experiencing sexual activity more as a mutual "expression of love" resonate with comments made by (non-transsexual) men in Fitzgerald's (1996) study of heterosexual masculinity. Although Babe recounts the story of moving from playing a "dominant role" to being "more relaxed" in his sexual relationship as though this is specific to him - as though this is part of coming to understand himself as a man - he is actually drawing on a discourse of heterosexual masculinity to construct his own experience. Rather than thinking, like Babe, that he has "had" this kind of experience and therefore "is" a heterosexual man, we might understand Babe to be strategically drawing on discourses of heterosexual masculinity to construct his post-transition identity. It is these discourses of masculinity - discourses saturated in heterosexism - that enable Babe's experience to make sense, just as they enable psycho-medical

approaches to transsexuals' sexuality to make sense. It is the same notion of heterosexist masculinity which Pauly (1974) employs to claim all FTM's to be erotically attracted to women *because that attraction is part of their masculinity*, that Babe employs to claim that he is really a man *because he is attracted to women*.

Whilst, for Babe, being a man (and being transsexual) clearly excluded the possibility of homosexuality, this was not so for Jim, Pat, or Myra who were willing to discuss the reality that some transsexual people are also gay, lesbian or bisexual. However, what Jim, Pat and Myra have in common with Babe is that they all described early memories of sexual attraction as part of what brought them to their current understanding of themselves as wo/men.

Pat responded to my asking when he first felt that he wanted to live as a man, by describing how he had always been attracted to girls and women.

Katrina: ... When was it that you actually started thinking you wanted to live as a man?

Pat: [From a] very young age ... I was having crushes on female teachers (I was in primary school). ... a very young age. I'd say [from] when I knew what it was to like another person. ... a young age, probably, take a stab at it, probably ten. But I never ever thought anything other than [that I didn't want a] guy [to] have sex with me ... no I wanted to be that guy.

So for Pat, like Babe, crushes on women teachers were integral to his sense of being of the "other" gender. Resistance to sex with men in the position of "a woman" is integral to wanting to be "a guy". That is, heterosexuality is assumed even though the congruity between anatomical sex and lived gender is not.

Myra seemed to echo a variation on the same theme, but this was embedded in a much more complex discussion of her current sexual identity. She describes herself as not being currently interested in sexual relationships, but being hypothetically more attracted to women than men. During the interview she toyed with the idea that this meant she was lesbian. She also supposed that if she were to embark on a sexual

relationship with a man this might mean having SRS, thus changing her identity from transgendered to transsexual. The idea of having a sexual relationship with a man seemed to be very hypothetical, as she described herself as always having chosen women as sexual partners in the past. However, she also described herself as always having preferred to take a less active role in sexual interactions, which she perceived as an indicator of her inherent femininity. Given this context, it came as a surprise to me to hear Myra describe her lack of interest in women during her teenage years as a sign of her transgenderism. Nevertheless, her words on her current thoughts about sexuality are: "I suspect, even after all these years, I'm still actually attracted to female[s], which is why I keep thinking, 'Would I be in fact a lesbian?'" Yet, in her description of herself as a youth, she said:

As a little teenage kid ... if you went to the ... movies with your classmates and sat beside a girl, one was expected to be one's 'male self' and do 'male things' and hug and kiss in the back row ... But I didn't like it.

On the same topic, Myra elaborated, saying:

I think I wasn't comfortable, but I didn't know that I wasn't comfortable. I was just learning, like any teenager. ... Even in those days I only really got interested in ... one and a half girls, whereas all the other classmates seemed to ... make a point of [having a] different girlfriend every month. It didn't have a high priority with me. Why, I still don't know, but I would be suspicious that [it] didn't have a priority because I wasn't male enough to desire it, right? Even in those days before I understood myself.

So, despite Myra's openness to thinking that she could describe herself as lesbian, and despite her acknowledgment that her primary attraction has always been towards girls and women, she manages to conclude that her lack of interest in teenage displays of sexuality was due to a lack of "maleness" on her part! Taken out of context, this suggestion of not being "male enough" could be read as a heterosexist assumption: one has to be male in order to desire girls or women sexually. In the context of Myra's interview, however, this interpretation is not totally convincing. Instead, I suggest

reading Myra's comment as a statement about the heteronormativity inherent in the kinds of teenage displays of sexuality she is describing. Then, instead of reading "I wasn't male enough" as simply referring to anatomical and physiological maleness, we could read "male" as "heterosexual man". Thus we can see how, as a youth, Myra was constrained by heterosexual expectations. Although attracted to women, she did not want to play the "male part" in heterosexual relationships. Her lack of interest in playing this role with her teenage peers may not have been a lack of interest in girls so much as a lack of interest in a normative heterosexual approach to sexual relationships.

Myra's ambivalence about her part in a heterosexual relationship is further illustrated through her talk about her relationship with her former wife. She described how:

When I did have sex in order to have a family, and enjoy sex ... my preference was to be the female part of the partnership. So even though I know I was the one with the penis, I enjoyed being seduced, being underneath, being caressed or whatever. And so, a more active female person, I enjoyed. But it didn't mean to say I couldn't have an erection, in those days. (I can't these days.) So I knew it worked! But it was working because it had to work. It was supposed to work ... [because of things] internally to do with being aroused. But it was perverse because I didn't want to be the male member of the copulating pair. That struck me as very strange at the time. Well, not strange, just: I knew that I was different because it oughtn't to be that way.

Although Myra expresses some confusion and uncertainty about questions of sexuality, she is very astute in the way she talks about the relationship between "heterosexual" and "homosexual" aspects of her sexual relationships and self-perceptions. She makes clear conceptual distinctions among sexual functioning, sexual role-playing, sexual attraction and her conception of herself as a transgendered woman, and she does not foreclose the question of how to identify herself sexually. Perhaps Myra is able to maintain this stance through referring to future sexual relations on a purely hypothetical level, unlike most of the other interviewees discussed here, who are in long-term sexual relationships.

Myra's talk about sexual attraction is far more complicated than that of Pat and Babe and, unlike them, she does not emphatically distance herself from the possibility of a homosexual identity. However, Myra's comment about not being "male enough" to initiate sexual relations with women as a teenager is one of the most strongly heterocentric statements to be found throughout the interviews with MTF's.

Like Myra, Jim was open to speculate on the possibility of being attracted to women or men but, like Babe and Pat, his primary lifelong attractions had been to girls / women. Having observed that he had always been attracted to girls / women and not to boys / men, interestingly, he said:

To have a penis and to penetrate is quite important to me. Because that's the way I feel I want to behave. And I've felt like that even from a very early age. So where it's come from [I don't know] ... because ... before I knew what sex was, and that boys had penises and girls didn't, I still had this urge.

So Jim was able to acknowledge the distinction between sexuality and gender: to acknowledge that being a FTM transsexual does not automatically mean that his primary attraction would be towards women. Nevertheless, in his specific case he has always had a sense that it is important to have a penis and that this has implications for his sexual relationships.

That Jim did not foreclose the possibility that he could have been gay, is shown by his (rather circuitous) comment: "I've never had any relationship with a man although there are some effeminate gay males that I've been attracted to so, if I'd been born a man - who knows?" But when it came to the possibility of being lesbian, Jim had tried this in his twenties only to find that his sense of being different from lesbians was insurmountable. He describes:

I actually came out as a lesbian, and (God forbid) I met my very first lesbian. These were women that were proud of being women! And I said:

'I feel like a man', and I got laughed at and I thought: 'Oops, gosh, I must be really different and odd'. And I spent a year [mixing in lesbian circles] ... but never really fitting in there either. ... I would see some of these real dykes, the ones who dressed up as men and even then they saw themselves as women, and ... I couldn't really identify with that.

Not being able to identify with lesbianism eventually led Jim to the understanding of himself as transsexual. Thus, although he is able to articulate clearly the conceptual independence of sexuality and lived gender, he is also aware of how fundamentally these two aspects of his life are intertwined and affect his lived reality as a man.

Mark was younger than the other interviewees discussed in this chapter and, unlike them, had only just begun taking hormones when we met. He was clearly aware of his attractions for women but had found it impossible to have sexual relationships due to the way he felt about his (female) body. According to his understanding, if he had a relationship with a woman prior to his transition it would be a "gay relationship". He suggested that a woman partner would perceive him as a woman and thus, in having a sexual relationship with her, he would effectively be deceiving her. He was emphatic that he was not "gay", by which he meant he would not feel comfortable in a woman-to-woman relationship. He also described how difficult it had been for him, experiencing attractions to women but knowing that those women saw him as a woman:

In college, I used to feel really uncomfortable being a female, especially with someone I really liked. I just didn't want to go next to them. I just felt embarrassed about my body.

...

I [would] feel really uncomfortable [if I was in a] relationship. I just feel the same way any boy would feel if [he] had breasts ... it's a block, I know. I know I shouldn't have it and I know it's making me frustrated ... but I just have that block. I can't help it. *Don't have a choice. I know.*

Unlike Pat, Babe and Jim, Mark had not had sexual relationships with women. But he did clearly assert himself as being not-gay, being not-woman, being “male”, and being attracted to women.

The transcript excerpts discussed above come from the interviews of all the FTM interviewees plus Myra’s interview. All the FTM interviewees (Mark, Babe, Jim, and Pat) told me how they differentiated themselves from lesbians. This is in contrast to the MTF interviewees who did not tend to talk about differentiating themselves from gay men, although some of them (Ami and Tania) had lived as gay men pre-transition. Of the six MTF interviewees, the only one who identified herself as having always been primarily or solely attracted to men was Ami. This can be compared with the four FTM, all of whom identified themselves as having only been attracted to women. For all the FTM interviewees, post-transition heterosexuality seemed to play a role in their conception of themselves as men. None of these people talked about the possibility of developing man-to-man sexual relationships (with the exception of Jim’s hypothetical comment about having had passing attractions to effeminate gay men). Of the MTF interviewees, however, one identifies as lesbian (Mimi) and another (Myra) willingly hypothesised about the possibility that she might be lesbian. Tracey also thought that she was more likely to be attracted to women, though she enjoyed a romantic fantasy of heterosexual involvement with a man.⁴⁴ Jean did not envisage herself in a sexual relationship with anyone, but indicated that she would not trust a man in that instance. Thus, the FTM interviewees presented a much more constant statement of their (post-transition) heterosexuality than did the MTF interviewees.

The purpose of discussing in detail such a small number of interviewees is not to make any generalisations about differences between MTF and FTM transsexuals. However, from the differences among these transsexual interviewees, it is possible to comment on the contexts in which these differences are forged. As could be expected, a

⁴⁴ On her questionnaire, Tracey wrote that she describes herself as “heterosexual” meaning that “I am attracted to women both as [male name] and as [Tracey]”. This provides an example of the confusion around using terms such as “heterosexual” and “homosexual” to describe transsexual and transgendered people.

discourse of heterocentrism not only permeates psycho-medical texts on transsexuality, but is evident in many transsexuals' talk about their own sexual attractions. The available discourses on gender, bodies, and (hetero)sexuality facilitate the particular readings of transsexuals' sexualities provided by the interviewees. What is interesting about this is the way the FTM interviewees insert themselves into a discourse of heterocentric transsexuality far more readily than do the MTF interviewees. Thus, I think what has been presented so far opens up questions about the paths that FTMs and MTFs travel in the course of their transitions, for it is these "paths" that tell us about the discursive context within which transsexuals forge their sexual identities.

MTF and FTM Pathways

Throughout this chapter, I have been alluding to the differences between MTF and FTM transsexuality: differences in how transsexuals talk about their sexual attractions, and differences in the attention received by MTF and FTM transsexuals within psycho-medical research. Here, I consider the implications of the differences between MTF and FTM interviewees' talk about sexuality, in the light of psycho-medical approaches to transsexuality.

Just as psycho-medical classification systems attempt to hold sexuality firmly in place - as something fixed, certain and nameable - so there is an attempt to fix gender categories. It is ironic that, even in the discussion of gender-transition, the assumption that there are "really" only two "genders" persists. From this premise come the assumptions that: (i) there are only two "directions" in which gender transition may take place: MTF and FTM; and (ii) MTF and FTM transsexualities are knowable, definable, and internally consistent entities. One result of these assumptions is that research "findings" from studies on MTF transsexuality have often been extrapolated to FTM transsexuality. In some respects, this process of grouping and extrapolation follows that which has historically occurred between male and female "homosexualities." Perhaps it is analogous to the assumption that "gay male" and "lesbian" identities necessarily have strong links or commonalties. Such an assumption

seems founded on a hegemonic logic that anything exceeding the “norm” can be necessarily grouped together.

In the early 1970's, Pauly carried out research on FTM transsexuality in an attempt to rectify the large numerical imbalance of research and clinical reports relating to FTM versus MTF transsexuality. He comments that, during his research on transsexuality, it took ten years to accumulate a sample of reports relating to eighty FTM transsexuals, whereas he was able to collect similar data on one hundred MTF's in only four years. Pauly suggests that the overwhelming focus on MTF transsexuality might in part be due to researcher gender-bias. That is, because most of the researchers were male, they attended “predominantly to the explanation of masculine gender identity and disorders thereof” (1974, p.487). He further accounts for the discrepancy through the assertion that there “is no question that female transsexualism is less prevalent than gender role misidentification in biological males” (p.488).⁴⁵ Recently, however, López has taken a more challenging stance in suggesting that “[m]ost practitioners involved in sex-change programmes are males who often exhibit bias towards male patients and discourage women who enquire for treatment” (1996, p.175). For whatever reason, FTM transsexuality is still vastly under-researched compared with MTF transsexuality. Therefore, I will draw from Pauly, whose study provides a useful material towards a comparative analysis of MTF and FTM transsexualities.

Pauly (1974) acknowledges that many attempts to describe FTM transsexuality have drawn primarily from references to “male transsexualism”. He appears to report uncritically Stoller's claim that “unlike their male counterparts females do not cross-dress for erotic, fetishistic purpose, but only for gender motives” (p.488). Billings and

⁴⁵ Since Pauly made this statement, the relative prevalence of MTF and FTM transsexualities has certainly been brought into question. However, I do not draw on “prevalence” statistics in this research because I perceive them to be misleading. Such statistics represent numbers of people who present to clinicians and researchers and are subsequently described / diagnosed as “transsexual”. This ignores the many people who may not want, or be able, to access the services of such psycho-medical professionals, or who identify themselves as transsexual / transgendered but may not “fit” the diagnostic criteria at any particular time.

Urban (1982) describe similarly that there “was considerably less agreement on the etiology and diagnosis of female transsexualism [than male transsexualism], partly because there is no concept of female transvestism” (p.270, footnote 10). This attempt to describe the relationship between transvestism and transsexuality highlights an anomaly in clinicians’ assumptions about women and cross-dressing, as well as drawing attention to the problems of categorising FTM and MTF “transsexuals” under one umbrella term. But more importantly than this, it demonstrates a loophole in psycho-medical conceptions of the relationship between transsexuality and that which is considered “sexual”.

It has been understood, within psycho-medical definitions, that transvestism occurs primarily (or exclusively) among males and this exists on a continuum with MTF transsexuality. Admittedly, it is more noticeable when a “man” is wearing “feminine” clothes than when a “woman” is wearing “male” attire, but how could this lead to a complete denial of female cross-dressing?

In writing about FTM sexual attractions and activities, Blanchard (1989) claims that whilst “fetishistic cross-dressing” is reported by many MTF transsexuals, it is “virtually unknown” among MTF’s. I have various concerns about this assertion. Why would a FTM experience arousal in men’s clothing, and if he did, why would he admit it to a clinician? How can we pretend that it is comparable for a pre-surgical FTM to wear trousers and a pre-surgical MTF to wear a dress? How can we assume that there is any similarity among what men, women, MTF’s and FTM’s describe as an experience of “arousal”? Given the enormous differences in meaning between (i) a male wearing a dress, (ii) a female wearing trousers and a shirt, (iii) the social construction of women’s and men’s sexualities and what constitutes sexual arousal for each; it is inconceivable that MTF and FTM transitions should be assumed to mirror one another. On the contrary, the pathways travelled by MTF’s and FTM’s are potentially very different. Noticing the differences in meanings of attire and sexual arousal is just the beginning.

A striking difference that can exist between MTF and FTM transsexuals relates to the ability to pass. It was observed by some of the interviewees that FTM transsexuals

passed almost by accident - or sooner than they had intended to - and found there was a relatively brief transition to being accepted as visibly male. Pauly makes a similar observation that among the MTF transsexual case studies he researched: "By the average age of 19.7 ... [the FTM's studied] have completely 'passed' into the male role, most of them very convincingly, so as never to be suspected of being female. They accomplish this deception in spite of being primarily medium- or average-sized females." (Pauly, 1974a, p.501). I suggest that the relative ease with which FTM's can pass as men, despite physical markers such as body size, relates partly to the different ways in which the boundaries of "man" and "woman" are policed. This presents another aspect of difference between the pathways that FTM's and MTF's travel.

In establishing differences between FTM and MTF pathways, I do not mean to imply homogeneity within each group. As I have already discussed, there are marked differences within each group simply on the grounds of sexual identities. In the following discussion, I will make some speculations about the striking similarity among FTM interviewees' talk about sexual attraction, and their difference from the MTF interviewees in this respect.

It is possible, of course, that the observed distinction between FTM and MTF interviewees' talk about sexual attraction is pure coincidence. This particular group of FTM interviewees could just happen to form a more homogenous group than the MTF's with regard to their experiences of sexual attraction. Alternatively, this marked difference could be an effect of the differential access that men and women have to non-normative expressions of sexuality and gender. Perhaps males who experience same-sex attraction have more scope for sexual exploration and for pushing gender role boundaries than do females. Perhaps gay male communities tend to be more tolerant of people venturing towards MTF transition than lesbian communities are of people undergoing a FTM transition.⁴⁶ Therefore, it would not become such an issue

⁴⁶ See Jeffreys' (1997) article for a recent lesbian feminist critique of transgenderism, which concludes that "transsexualism should be seen as a violation of human rights" (p.55). (I am not aware of any gay male literature expressing such venomous condemnations of transsexual existence.)

1974 not
transsexual
is
policed performance

for a MTF to identify him/herself as “not-gay” relative to the importance of deciding that one does not “fit” within lesbian identity as a FTM.

Another possible interpretation relates to the greater level of gender fluidity that is tolerated among girls / women compared with boys / men. A woman who does not wish to live within a traditional “feminine” gender role may find many ways to live otherwise, whether through sporting pursuits, career, political ideologies, or choice of sexual partner. Thus, only those who feel “not-woman” to the greatest extreme may pursue transsexuality as a way of understanding their gendered experience. Whereas a man might have fewer options available for exploration outside of what is accepted as “masculine”. If the borders around “man” are more tightly constraining, then one has a lesser distance to travel from “man” before one finds oneself in the area marked “not-man”. Thus, perhaps identifying as FTM is necessarily a stronger and more definitive statement of “not-woman” than identifying as MTF is a statement of being “not-man”. And perhaps “woman” more easily encompasses the possibility of homosexual or fluid sexual attractions than does “man”.¹

The interpretations suggested above are not exclusive of one another. Nor am I implying that a female-to-gay-man transition is not possible. It is conceivable that what is observed through the interviews is an effect of the policing of the various boundaries of “man,” “woman,” “heterosexual,” “gay,” and “lesbian”. For whatever reason, among those interviewed it seemed to be more possible to be flexible about sexual identity as MTF and more important to be certain of one’s heterosexuality as FTM.

Conclusion

By approaching the literature discussed in this chapter with a critical eye to the ontologising of transsexuality, I have been able to highlight the obsession of psycho-medical writings with gender normativity: an obsession which is justified on the grounds of promoting mental health. Attempts to promote mental health through discouraging non-normative gendered and sexual behaviour have persisted through

various permutations of diagnostic jargon and therapeutic practice. I have sought to challenge not only the diagnostic categories themselves, but the process of constructing transsexuality as a diagnostic category.

The various attempts within psycho-medical research to develop classification systems for homosexualities and transsexualities have certain problems in common. Questions which demonstrate problematic assumptions underpinning such classification systems include the following: Does this system allow for variation across time, or does it assume a fixed identity for the whole "post-transition" period? How does this system account for the sexual identity of the transsexual person's partner? Is this partner assumed to continue being simply heterosexual / lesbian / gay, or is a new set of terms required to describe her/his sexuality too? Does this system assume that there are only two possible sexes to which one can be attracted? How does this system accommodate transsexuals who state their sexual preference to include other transsexuals? (One of the participants who responded to my questionnaire survey described himself as "trisexual", explaining that he was attracted to men, women, and transsexuals.) How does this system account for the relationship between pre-transition sexual attraction and post-transition attraction; i.e. does it differentiate between someone who is attracted (for instance) to women both before and after transition and someone whose stated attraction changes such that they appear "heterosexual" both before and after transition? Clearly, these questions are not all relevant from the point of view of research concerned with aetiology and diagnosis. Such research seeks to simplify, whilst I seek to provide a more complex approach to these issues. In some ways the questions I suggest are highly pedantic; the questions are not designed to be answered but to demonstrate the problems of any attempt to confine sexuality and gender within a classification system.

Psycho-medical constructions of transsexuality have been founded on heterosexist assumptions. Psycho-medical institutions have an investment in maintaining heterosexism because of the interdependence of "sexuality" and "gender". To challenge heterosexism would be to risk undermining the hegemonic assumptions about "gender" upon which psycho-medical approaches to transsexuality are founded. If non-normative gendering was no longer understood in terms of pathology or

perversity, psycho-medical writings on the classification, aetiology and treatment of transsexuality would be obsolete.

Because of the interdependence of “sexuality” and “gender” within pathologising models, each represents a point of resistance for the other. Challenging heterosexism opens ways for challenging transphobia and vice-versa. Hence the importance of considering the relationship between subversive theorising of sexuality and transgender theorising. These threads are taken up in Part Four, where I discuss transgender theorising, and Part Five whose focus is “queer theory”. Both queer and transgender theorists offer comprehensive challenges to psycho-medical models of sexuality and gender.

In this chapter, I have focused on psycho-medical texts which highlight the risks of classification for transsexuals. This certainly does not mean that all psycho-medical professionals or publications invest in these risky classification practices in the same ways. What I have done is identify a discursive thread through which the psycho-medical classification of transsexuality becomes institutionalised, and through which heterosexist assumptions about transsexuals are perpetuated. Rather than just critiquing worst-case scenarios of psycho-medical classification, it is also important to encourage more careful theorising of transsexuality. To this end, some theorists have taken up psychoanalytic approaches, which have the potential to theorise workings of sexual difference and desire. This discussion is taken up further in Chapter Seven.

CHAPTER SIX: OF RIGHT BODIES AND WRONG BODIES: THE FORGING OF CORPUS TRANSSEXUALIS THROUGH DISCURSIVE MANOEUVRE AND SURGICAL MANIPULATION.

Introduction

The conception of transsexuality as a case of being “trapped in the wrong body” pervades medical, media, and many transsexuals’ understandings of transsexuality. At first glance, this “wrong-body” approach may appear a benign, if oversimplified, way of explaining a phenomenon that threatens to disrupt some of the most basic assumptions about human existence. I suggest, however, that conceptualising transsexuality in terms of being trapped in the wrong body constitutes a discursive manoeuvre which has developed out of, and in turn maintains, medical constructions of transsexuality.⁴⁷ Thus, the “wrong-body” discourse thwarts attempts of transgenderists to politicise transsexuality and to challenge the restrictive and disempowering (to transsexuals) aspects of medical approaches to transsexuality.

One such transgenderist, Sandy Stone, explains how the conceptual possibility of being “in the wrong body” emerged through the writings of Harry Benjamin and then was creatively and strategically deployed by transsexuals to improve their chances of

⁴⁷ It is not within the scope of this chapter to speculate about the origins of the wrong-body discourse: in whose interests it was to initiate this particular conception of transsexuality, what understandings about bodies and selves initially enabled the wrong-body discourse to make sense, how transsexuals first came to describe their experience in terms of being “in the wrong body”, or why the wrong-body discourse has been so pervasive within the criteria for SRS assessment despite attempts to develop more comprehensive psycho-medical understandings of transsexuality.

being accepted for SRS (Stone, 1991).⁴⁸ The effect of the surgical imperative on transsexuals has inspired various political challenges to psycho-medical definitions of transsexuality. That many transsexuals persist in seeking some form of reconstructive surgery (and / or hormones) is evident, but does this mean that they necessarily understand themselves as being “in the wrong body”?

What I discuss in this chapter is how the wrong-body discourse currently operates with regard to transsexuals’ ways of talking about transsexuality and transgenderists’ attempts to redefine transsexuality and transsexual bodies. My discussion focuses on the political tensions existing around the question of whether or not to opt for SRS. As a route into exploring these political tensions, I interrogate the way the wrong-body discourse is employed within psycho-medical definitions of transsexuality.

A strident criticism of psycho-medical approaches to transsexuality is Billings and Urban’s (1982) article. Their work exposes aspects of medical practice which bring into question the basis for the medical construction of transsexuality and presents a strong challenge to the procedures employed by psycho-medical professionals in relation to transsexuality. They demonstrate the importance of the wrong-body discourse to proponents of sex-reassignment surgery. For SRS to be justified ethically, it was vital to construct transsexuality as non-psychopathic, otherwise surgeons performing SRS were open to the criticism that they were colluding with psychotic urges. Developing an aetiological picture of transsexuality as non-psychopathic meant locating the “problem” in the transsexual’s body. Billings and Urban’s (1982) article is of particular relevance here because of their critical stance towards sex-reassignment surgery and their interrogation of medical professionals’ possible motivations for colluding with transsexuals in the description of transsexuality as a “wrong body” phenomenon. Billings and Urban view transsexuality as a medically constructed phenomenon and interrogate the economic and ideological implications of SRS. They “contend that sex-change surgery reflects and extends late-capitalist logics of

⁴⁸ In 1954 Harry Benjamin first described “transsexualism” as an illness which could be distinguished from transvestism and homosexuality. He drew on the case of Jorgensen as an example, writing that s/he was a woman trapped in a man’s body.

reification and commodification, while simultaneously reaffirming traditional male and female gender roles" (p.266).

According to Billings and Urban, one of the incentives for medical professionals' defence of SRS as a valid and ethically appropriate treatment has been financial. An over-abundance of surgeons in the United States meant that "unnecessary" operations became more popular as surgeons competed for patients (Billings and Urban, 1982). One of the people I interviewed indicated that his costs in psychiatrists' fees for consultation, recommending surgery, and providing follow-up, came to \$NZ900. His total expenditure so far on psychiatrists' and surgeons' fees has been \$NZ6,000; and that only includes the bilateral mastectomy. On telephoning one Christchurch surgeon who does SRS, I was quoted \$NZ22,000 for MTF surgery and told that FTM surgery was not available. No medical insurance company or broker knew of a New Zealand company which would offer medical insurance covering the cost of SRS.

The criticisms that Billings and Urban direct at psycho-medical constructions of transsexuality and dealings with transsexuals are important in terms of understanding the role of the wrong-body discourse in transsexuals' interactions with psycho-medical institutions. Most importantly for this chapter, Billings and Urban write that SRS "privatizes and depoliticizes individual experiences of gender role distress" (Billings and Urban, 1982, p.266). Whilst this statement presents a challenge to medical constructions of transsexuality, and to understandings of transsexuality as a "wrong body" phenomenon, it also threatens to place some transsexual and transgender people in a catch-22 situation. Billings and Urban's statement could be read to imply that taking up a political critique of psycho-medical constructions of transsexuality means challenging the imperative to surgically trans-sex: that transsexual political empowerment means living as transgendered whilst refusing SRS. Yet, on the other hand, one of the political achievements of transsexual people has been to make surgical options more accessible and to fight for their legal validation. Some of the diverse ways of dealing with this paradox will become apparent below as the perspectives of various transsexual and transgendered people are discussed.

Arguing against a “wrong body” conception of transsexuality is not the same as arguing against SRS. Rather, it means rethinking the possible rationales for SRS. It means taking into account the possibility that anything as consciously knowable and sayable as a “rationale” might be quite different from the underlying, unconscious, motivating factors relating to the aspects of gendered subjectivity and embodiment affecting a transsexual person’s decision to opt for SRS.⁴⁹ Arguing against a “wrong body” perspective on transsexuality presents a challenge to: psycho-medical constructions of transsexuality; bases for decisions about the legal status of post-operative relative to pre-operative and non-operative transsexuals; dominant (contemporary, western) discourses about the correlation between sexual anatomy and gendered subjectivity; and any psychiatric classification of transsexuality which fails to accommodate the lived diversity and fluidity of gender.

In the next section on transgender theories, I argue that describing transsexuality through the wrong-body discourse is not only a simple way of skimming over complex issues but it is also a technique which enables psycho-medical approaches to transsexuality to make sense, thus empowering psycho-medical institutions to construct transsexuality. The subsequent and longer discussion of how some interviewees utilised the wrong-body discourse demonstrates that SRS is one way of putting into practice the belief that transsexuality is about being “in the wrong body,” but there are people who opt for SRS while retaining a critical distance from the wrong-body discourse. One way of challenging the power imbalance between transsexuals and psycho-medical institutions might be to live as transgendered without choosing the medicalised processes deemed appropriate for transsexuals.

⁴⁹ Here I am referring to the works of Catherine Millot (1990) and Charles Shepherdson (1994) who consider psychoanalytic interpretations of transsexed embodiment, and are discussed at greater length in Chapter Seven.

Transgender Theories

As Billings and Urban suggest, to medicalise transsexuality is to depoliticise transsexuality. Contemporary transgenderists' writings, however, explicitly politicise transsexuality. Here I will briefly draw from specific transgenderists' writings to illustrate aspects of the relationship between the wrong-body discourse and critiques of medical approaches to transsexuality.

Sandy Stone, in her landmark chapter: "The 'Empire' Strikes Back: A Posttranssexual Manifesto" (1991), describes aspects of the development of transsexuality within psycho-medical science and clinical practice. She writes that when the first (U.S.) academic gender clinics were set up in the 1960's, it became important to establish official diagnostic criteria for transsexuality to ensure the professional credibility of those working at the clinics, to maintain ethical standards, and to establish tenable grounds upon which further funding applications could be made. In the absence of literature on transsexuality to guide clinical decisions, Harry Benjamin's book, "The Transsexual Phenomenon" (1966), was the text that was most frequently turned to, both by psycho-medical professionals and by transsexuals seeking surgery. Transsexuals who entered gender clinics, seeing the opportunity to capitalize on the "professionals'" limited understanding of transsexuality, made concerted efforts to provide the behaviour that would most likely lead to their acceptance for surgery. In part, this meant "they unambiguously expressed Benjamin's original criterion in its simplest form: The sense of being in the 'wrong' body" (Stone, 1991, p.292). Stone is critical of the subsequent failure to problematize the wrong-body discourse - both within the medical establishment and among transsexuals - and casts suspicion on how the idea of a "wrong body" has come to define transsexuality.

It is almost a decade since Stone presented transsexuals with the challenge to seek subject positions outside the bounds of normative gender categories. In that time there has been prolific growth in the area of queer writings generally, and significant response from some transsexual and transgendered authors specifically (e.g.: Halberstam, 1994; Feinberg, 1993, 1996; Nataf, 1996; MacKenzie, 1994; Namaste, 1996; Bornstein, 1995; Stryker, 1994). In the context of the evolution of queer theory

out of the field formerly known as gay and lesbian studies, some academic writings are developing critiques of gender, sex, and sexuality which are beginning to address Stone's concerns. Of particular interest here is the body of work which I call "transgender theories"⁵⁰ and which presents counter-discourses to dominant understandings of bodies, gender, sexuality, transsexuality and of what is "natural."

To provide an illustration of the relevance of contemporary transgender theorising for the current discussion of the wrong-body discourse, I will draw from the following three texts: Susan Stryker's (1994) essay, *My Words to Victor Frankenstein Above the Village of Chamounix: Performing Transgender Rage*, Gordene MacKenzie's (1994) book, *Transgender Nation*, and Kate Bornstein's (1995) provocative work, *Gender Outlaw: On Men, Women, and the Rest of Us*. These three texts represent reasonably diverse styles of argumentation, sometimes appealing specifically to academic audiences, and sometimes speaking to a wider audience. What they have in common is an understanding of transgenderism as presenting a challenge to normative modes of gendering, an awareness of the tensions in the question of how to, or how not to, invest in the medical technologies through which transsexuality is constructed, and some discussion of the conceptualisation of transsexuality as a "wrong body" phenomenon.

MacKenzie claims that transsexuality has a potentially subversive relationship to normative constructions of gender. She echoes Billings and Urban's statement by arguing that the subversive potential of transsexuality is diminished through medicalization. MacKenzie writes that the "transsexual challenge to gender bipolarity has ... been controlled through surgery. Surgery becomes the means through which transsexuals are promised cultural 'acceptance'" (1994, p.146). Thus, MacKenzie describes cultural acceptance as being purchased at the price of surgery, that is, at the price of subscribing (at least provisionally) to the notion of being in the "wrong body."

⁵⁰ See Elliot and Roen (1998) for a more detailed discussion of transgender theories.

Bornstein (1995) elaborates, pointing out that social and material benefits have been made available to transsexuals who describe themselves as being on a quest to acquire the “right body.” She writes:

until the last few years, all we 'd been able to write and get published were our autobiographies, tales of women trapped in the bodies of men or men pining away in the bodies of women. Stories by and about brave people who 'd lived their lives hiding deep within a false gender - and who, after much soul-searching, decided to change their gender, and spent the rest of their days hiding deep within another false gender.

(Bornstein, 1994, pp.12-13)

Like Stone, Bornstein considers why transsexuals have chosen to articulate their situation in terms of being trapped in the wrong body: claiming to have found one’s “true self” through “sex-change” gets books published! Like MacKenzie, Bornstein develops an interpretation which juxtaposes transsexuals who openly challenge gender norms to those who attempt to conform and assimilate into normative genders.

MacKenzie contends that, according to medical approaches to transsexuality, “[g]etting a cosmetically altered body is supposed to allow the transsexual to ‘assimilate’ into the ... world of ‘real men and women’,” and she questions how “disappearing through the looking glass of ‘assimilation,’ which for most transsexuals entails denying their entire personal history,” could possibly be personally empowering or ultimately fulfilling (1994, p.147). For MacKenzie, there seem to be two kinds of fulfilment which may be attainable by transsexual people, but which are juxtaposed: one is the cultural acceptance which supposedly follows from attaining the “right body,” the other is the political empowerment of choosing not to assimilate, not to become invisible as transsexual. In discussing the juxtaposition of these two approaches to transgendered subjectivity, MacKenzie unfolds a further level of complexity when she acknowledges the tension that exists within transgender communities around the question of surgery. On the one hand, campaigning for access to SRS has been a galvanising factor for some politically active transsexuals. On the

other hand, there can be considerable fears that, post-SRS, individuals will leave the “community” and assimilate, abandoning their political work.

Both MacKenzie and Bornstein prioritise the role of “gender outlaws” (Bornstein’s term) in disrupting the “gender system.” In doing so, they take up aspects of Stone’s posttranssexual challenge and articulate it in the terms of political activism and texts which read transsexuality subversively. Neither of them, however, problematizes transsexual embodiment with the flair of Stryker.

Stryker, through her radical act of reclaiming the “monstrous”, responds simultaneously to the wrong-body discourse and to the disempowering effects of being defined within psycho-medical parameters through seeking surgery. Unlike the forms of reclaiming which occur through identity politics, Stryker’s reclaiming has a distinctly nineties / queer / postmodern flavour. She not only reclaims transsexuality - suggesting that transsexuality may be defined by transsexuals rather than by medical professionals - but she also reclaims the monstrous spectre of the transsexual body, writing that “[t]ranssexual embodiment, like the embodiment of the monster, places its subject in an unassimilable, antagonistic, queer relationship to a Nature in which it must nevertheless exist” (1994, pp.242-243).

Rather than striving for assimilation, rather than working from the conviction that there is a “wrong body,” Stryker embraces the monstrous, embraces the queer, and thus subverts hegemonic assumptions about bodies and their relationship to gendered ways of being. According to Stryker’s argument, it may no longer be necessary to consider a non-surgical option as being “trapped in the wrong body” nor to consider surgery as disempowering to the individual and depoliticising for transsexuality. She reminds the reader that despite the conservative and normalising *motivations* of medical science, there is no guarantee that the post-surgical subject will comply with medicalised gender norms.

From this point of view, transgenderists may pose a radical threat to medical constructions of transsexuality whether or not they opt for surgery. Medical science can attempt to define transsexuality and regulate who has access to SRS, but has only

limited scope for addressing the politics of those who do not seek SRS, or those who (like Bornstein) have SRS and then later take up the challenge against the “gender system.” That is, with only limited success can science “contain and colonize the radical threat posed by a particular transgender strategy of resistance to the coerciveness of gender” (Stryker, 1994, p.244). In true poststructuralist style, Stryker reminds us that the meanings and representations of transsexual bodies ultimately shift and take on new forms in ways that reflect the corporeal politics of those who identify themselves as transsexual.

Genitalia as “Congenital Defect”?

I have introduced various approaches to critiquing the conception of transsexuality as a matter of being trapped in the “wrong body” and have begun discussing the relationship of specific transgender arguments to aspects of the medicalization of transsexuality. Here I ask the question: how does the wrong-body discourse operate, and what is the role of SRS, for transsexual and transgendered people in a local contemporary context? In order to explore this question, I will draw on the interview transcripts. Although at no point in the interviews did I raise the issue of the “wrong body,” various interviewees did employ, or talk critically about, the idea of being “trapped in the wrong body” in ways which have prompted and informed the current discussion.

The interviewees I will cite for the purposes of this discussion are: Babe, a 37 year-old FTM; Jim, a 46 year old post-operative FTM; Myra, a 49 year old non-surgical transgendered MTF; and Tania, a 36 year old pre-surgical MTF transsexual.

Those who mentioned the wrong-body discourse in order to refute it suggested that it was merely an oversimplified notion that is promoted through popular media, and is sometimes useful for explaining transsexuality to someone who has thought little about it before. Those who inserted themselves into the wrong-body discourse in order to explain their predicament argued strongly for better access to SRS,

suggesting that their emotional or psychological well-being was under threat due to the unavailability of surgical reassignment technologies to them.

Babe, who has been living as a man for more than 13 years, has had bilateral mastectomies, oophorectomies, and a hysterectomy but was still awaiting what he described as “penile reconstruction” at the time of our interview. Babe states uncategorically: “really the main theme I’m on is: transsexuals like myself are trapped in the wrong body”. He goes on to say: “I see myself as a man. The only thing that makes me ... feel incomplete is because I haven’t gone to the final stage of the change where I can confidently say to you that I **am** a man”. Not only does he make this assertion about himself, but he feels confident in generalising across transsexuals, claiming: “I just feel that I am a person that’s trapped in the wrong body, and you’ll find that across the board as well with a lot of transsexuals.”

Although during the interview with Babe I did not initiate talk about the possibility of his feeling “trapped in the wrong body,” I did ask him about his motivations for seeking SRS. In response to this he said: “I think for me I would feel good if I had the complete change. I would feel fully a man, feel complete.” I also asked Babe what he meant by “being a man” or “feeling that he is a man.” This was a question he seemed to find difficult to answer, but he was certain that: “to be a man you have to have all the physical characteristics ... you’ve got to have the genital part of a man ... and you’ve got to function as a man.” So, after some hesitation, the most substantial part of his answer was that “being a man” was about having a “male” body. Yet, when asked about the word “transsexual,” Babe gave the following answers: “I don’t like the word transsexual, I don’t even like the word transgender,” and: “if there was no such term as transsexual ... I would just regard myself as a man,” and, most importantly: “I’m not a transsexual because I feel that I’m man inside, that’s how I see myself, that is how I perceive myself, it’s how I live.” That is, when asked about what it meant to “be a man,” Babe emphasised the importance of male anatomical features, but when asked about being “transsexual,” Babe argued that he would really prefer to think of himself as a “man” than as “transsexual,” on the grounds that he feels he is a man “inside.” So, is being a “man” about anatomical features (which may imply a

“wrong body” perception), or about how one feels “inside” (which may render SRS pointless)?

Babe talked about how it was important to be himself, rather than conforming to other people’s versions of masculinity. He said: “I just never really conformed to being like men, I just accept me for who I am,” and: “I’m just my person, I’m just the person I am.” He talked about the need to create one’s own culture, as a transsexual person, and that culture provides a place where one can be oneself, without having to conform to norms of maleness and femaleness. Babe said: “[W]hen you are transsexual you really have no culture out there, coz in your culture they don’t accept you,” so: “you have to make your own culture, which means you don’t have to conform to how the male behaves or how the women behave - you just be yourself.” He also talked about the way that characteristics of men and women overlap.

Babe’s talk is in various respects contradictory. At first, he described what it was to “be a man” in terms that were entirely based on physical features, focusing on his perceived need for SRS. Then, he talked about “man” and “woman” as more flexible concepts which overlapped and which could be incorporated within one person. He also claimed that it was important for him to “be himself” and not have to conform to male norms. Yet he seeks SRS, describing it as something that would make an important, possibly even a crucial, contribution to his psychological health. When I expressed confusion about this contradiction between his assertions about being in the wrong body and his claims to gender fluidity, he told me simply: “But for your body it’s something else!” That is, Babe was willing to consider his FTM transition as fluid in terms of gendered ways of being, except when it came to his sexual anatomy, which he articulated determinedly and repeatedly in terms of being “in the wrong body.”

Babe demonstrates repeatedly that he is not someone who would be admitted to Bornstein’s highly esteemed category of “gender outlaws.” He perceives it as a psychological need that he go through the surgical processes enabling him to conform on a corporeal level to his idea of “being a man.” In no way is he proud of his (partially) transsexed body. Rather than echoing Stryker’s enthusiasm about monstrosity, he expresses considerable dissatisfaction and concern about his

ambiguously sexed body. Instead of endorsing MacKenzie's critique of medical processes, Babe talks about medical technologies as though they can offer him ultimate empowerment. For Babe, describing his situation by drawing on the idea of being trapped in the wrong body makes sense. It makes sense in terms of his desire not to disclose the incompleteness of his transition to his Christian friends, thus inviting the shaming of himself and his girlfriend. It makes sense in terms of his desire to return to a family environment where conservative values prevail and only the most conclusive "proof" that he is a "man" is likely to alter their perception of him as a woman; as the daughter, sister, or niece who left home years ago. It is in these arenas that Babe seeks empowerment, not within transsexual communities, academic debates, or amongst transgender political activists. And it is in these arenas that the wrong-body discourse enables Babe to make sense of (thereby constructing and restricting) his choices.

Jim demonstrates how someone living in the same city (as Babe), and developing a sense of his transsexuality over the same two decades, can make similar choices, but interpret those choices quite differently. Jim underwent the final iteration of his SRS seven years prior to our interview, and had been living as a man for more than twenty years. Like Babe, Jim has made a female-to-male transition. Unlike Babe, Jim's surgical reassignment process has been completed. Also unlike Babe, Jim brought up the phrase "trapped in a woman's body" primarily to say that it did **not** adequately express how he felt, or what he thought about his situation. He began by saying "I could say [being transsexual is about being] a man trapped in a woman's body" but that "just seems a little oversimplified." He elaborated with the comment: "I don't know whether we're **trapped**." Jim said that for him being transsexual was about "being born a female but feeling as a man."

Jim expresses some concern at the prioritizing of SRS over other life events. He justifies this concern by describing a scenario where the idea of SRS comes to represent an unrealistic set of expectations for the transsexual person involved. He said:

No matter how much surgery you have it doesn't actually change you. You can change your body around but you don't actually change you, which is where the danger lies with a lot of these people who think: 'Well I'm going to go off, I'm going to have this operation, I'm going to suddenly be transformed ... I won't be this person any more'. But they go, and come out of it, and a few months down the track they realise that ... nothing's changed.

Here Jim is illustrating one of the risks of investing in the wrong-body discourse. This risk involves the assumption that there is an "inner self" who is trapped inside the "wrong body" and who may therefore be set free or allowed to emerge through the wonders of SRS. Such an assumption clearly sets up at least some transpeople for great disappointment.

Jim describes how, although he was raised as a girl and did live as a woman for some time, he was often not perceived unproblematically as a woman. He said "when I was a woman [people] thought I was a man, and thought I was different, or I was a lesbian, or I was something - but I wasn't a woman." Nevertheless, Jim does not seem to think that it is simply a case of being a woman or a man. Rather, how he appears in terms of gender, seems to be an expression of preference rather than an expression of some "inner self." He says: "I'd rather be seen as a man because ... there's no way I could be a woman". He adds, however, "I don't think that I fit in being a man either." And to sum up, he said: "We're both and we're neither, transsexuals. We're both and we're neither."

In conceding that transsexuals do not simply face the task of finding the "right" gender or constructing the "right" body, Jim develops an argument reminiscent of Bornstein's. Like transgender theorists, he is willing to be critical of the wrong-body discourse, and wary of fantastical ideas about the capabilities of medical science. Like Babe, he has felt surgical reassignment is sufficiently important to warrant undergoing the various operations and bearing the accompanied costs. Like transgender theorists who have undergone SRS, Jim is simultaneously critical of the idea that he was "in the wrong body" - the idea upon which is founded the rationale for the technological

development and availability of SRS processes - whilst investing in SRS. Jim demonstrates that SRS can be opted for, without the wrong-body discourse being endorsed. Or does he?

Read through MacKenzie's text, Jim's surgery can be seen as enabling his disappearance "through the looking glass of assimilation." From this perspective the radical potential of Jim's transsexual status to subvert the wrong-body discourse is undermined. Yet, read via Stryker, Jim's choice to have SRS does nothing to ensure his compliance with the discursive frameworks that have made SRS conceivable. How might this be different for someone who, like Jim, is critical of the idea that s/he is trapped in the wrong body but who, unlike Jim, chooses not to have SRS?

Myra, who has taken hormones over a period of seven years but has not had SRS, lives as a woman and thinks of herself as transgendered but still finds it necessary to present herself as male in some circumstances. Myra said: "I don't have ... an emotional sensation that I'm in the wrong body and I've got to change my physical body," and "there's no need to say that [I'm in the wrong body]. There's no need to feel that." She explains that there are many "so-called transgendered people that have got on in life quite OK without having to do the surgical thing." According to her, the "law dictates that you must [go through surgery] otherwise you can't change your gender. That's ridiculous!"⁵¹ She was emphatic that the importance of SRS originated in medical understandings of transsexuality, saying: "that's just an old-fashioned medical dictation. They invented that rule, we didn't." This claim appears to be consistent with Stone's account of the way "information" about transsexuality and its diagnostic criteria circulated between medical professionals and their transsexual clients.

⁵¹ At the time of Myra's interview, the birth sex could not be altered legally on the birth certificate at all, however, this has now changed. As of 1st September, 1996, it has been possible to legally attain a birth certificate in Aotearoa / New Zealand that states only the post-transition sex. One of the conditions for an individual wishing to make this change is that s/he has had SRS. (For further discussion of the legal status of transgender people in Aotearoa / New Zealand, see Alston, 1998a and 1998b).

Myra talked about her transgender identity as something that concerned the way she lived, and the way people saw her, rather than the way her body was. She seemed to be clear about the fact that she was not “a man” or “a woman,” but that she could present herself as, and be read as, either in certain situations. At times, she talked about her sexual anatomy merely as something trivial and inconvenient. In talking about her genitals, she said: “sometimes I feel that it’s a bit annoying that my organs are still there but they’re so small and so hopeless and useless that it’s just a wart.” Then, more specifically about her penis, she said “it’s an unwanted blip or hunk of flesh which might as well not be there coz I don’t need it and it’s just occasionally an annoyance.”

From the perspective of the present discussion, Myra stands in stark contrast to Babe, and has also made quite different choices from Jim. She responds to the notion of being trapped in the wrong body by saying that it is not necessary or helpful to understand transgenderism in that way. She has chosen not to have surgery, yet she is open to the possibility that one day she might choose to have surgery. Either way, for Myra, her body is not an indicator of what gender she is. Myra expresses her understanding of this by saying that she is not transsexual, but transgendered. According to her description, “woman” is about the gender that she lives within, not about the biological sex to which her body conforms.

Despite my enthusiasm for reading Myra’s positioning of herself in relation to transgender theories - despite the momentum I have built up for showing Myra’s situation as a beautiful example of transgendered corporeal subversion of medical discourses on transsexuality - I have to admit there are some problems here. Myra is emphatic about the surgical imperative having originated within the medical institution, not amongst transsexual people. She repeatedly claims that it does not make sense to her to think of herself as being “in the wrong body.” She mentions the physical changes brought about by hormones as something she enjoys rather than something that is necessary. However, she then depicts her hormonally altered “male” genitalia in terms evoking the comical, the absurd, the trivial. Through hormonal treatment, her penis comes to resemble little more, in her eyes, than a “wart,” a “blip,”

or a “hunk of flesh.” Are we to pretend this is an accident? Am I to argue: this person does not subscribe to the belief that she was “in the wrong body,” but she has coincidentally reduced her penis to “a wart”?

I think the aspects of Myra’s interview which I am discussing here highlight the importance of not taking the interviewees’ arguments at face value. Furthermore, this means not assuming there can be an unequivocal reading of the decision to undergo SRS, and not assuming there is a simple relationship between a person’s willingness to critique medical approaches to transsexuality, their decision to opt for SRS, and their feelings about their body years after that decision has been made. The complexity of issues raised by the interview material discussed so far reveals the problematic simplicity of transgender theorising which relies on uncritical notions of passing and fails to problematise transsexed embodiment. An analysis of investments in the wrong-body discourse, which may be relevant to transsexual individuals in Aotearoa / New Zealand, prompts the following questions: How might religious and familial values affect a transsexual person’s perception of their own transsexed body? Is it possible to develop meaningful theories about the implications of seeking SRS, when the motivations toward and the interpretations of that kind of bodily transition may differ greatly from one person to another? What theoretical opportunities get missed through the intense focusing on surgical aspects of bodily change, with relatively minor interest in changes brought about by hormonal treatments? How might legal and wider social changes be spurred on by theorising that prioritises hormonally-induced aspects of transition? How might it be detrimental to some transsexuals’ political causes to acknowledge that for many transpeople hormonal changes are all that is desired?

Myra, Babe and Jim demonstrate some of the diversity and contradictions that can arise when considering transsexuality through the wrong-body discourse. I would also like to discuss Tania’s perspective on her transition - not because she talks as overtly as the other three about the idea of transsexuality as a “wrong body” phenomenon - but because she presents an example of the dilemmas involved in either adhering to or rejecting the wrong-body discourse.

At the age of 36, Tania is in the process of a MTF transition. During our interview, she made it clear that, for her, bodily changes were an important part of that transition. She also emphasised that SRS was a goal in that it was something tangible that one could aim for, not that it was the ultimate statement of her transsexuality. In some respects, she seemed to be more concerned about the overall **process** of transition, de-emphasising the importance of SRS as only one part of that process. In other respects, at the time of the interview, Tania did focus heavily on corporeal aspects of the transition, such as clothing, hair, nails, gesture, breasts, and genitals. She had considered opting against SRS on the grounds that, as Maaori, it may not be so necessary or appropriate for her to insert herself into (contemporary western) medical understandings of transsexuality in order to live as a woman.

Although she criticises medico-legal constructions of transsexuality for insinuating that “to be a woman is to be a hole, is to be a vagina,” Tania has set herself the goal of aiming for surgery, as one of a number of changes that she is making to her physical appearance (via hormones and clothing). She appears to be employing medical gender reassignment technologies in a politically critical way. She does not describe herself as seeking the help of medical practitioners, but considers employing subversive techniques to get what she wants in the way of medical services. Tania perceives herself as neither male nor female, but states that she wants to live and be perceived as a woman, for the sake of not being seen as a freak by the majority of people who approach gender from a strictly either / or perspective. Thus, although she is concerned to pass and to access SRS, this does not mean that, as Billings and Urban might suggest, Tania’s transsexuality becomes depoliticised and individualised. On the contrary, as a Maaori person, Tania is critical of investing in western / Pakeha conceptions of the relationship between the body and gender. She approaches the decision to have SRS critically and with strong political agendas.

Despite Tania’s suggestion that genital reassignment is merely one step in a long transition process, in describing how she came to identify herself as transsexual she highlighted the role of her (pre-operative) genitalia. To demonstrate how she did this, I will paraphrase her description of the process that occurred before she started considering herself as transsexual.

At first, Tania said, there was only the awareness that “something was wrong,” and that was a realisation that came “over a long period of time.” She described not knowing what was wrong but having “flashes” of realisation that “it’s something of a sexual nature.” Through this long process, Tania said, hypothetically, one “might become impotent ... because somewhere in the back of your mind there is this sense that it’s something to do with your penis.” She then referred to the various ways that MTF transsexuals deal with their ambivalence towards their penises. She pointed out that “a lot of us are big and we often choose to be big because you have a stomach that hangs down and hides your crutch,” and that “you get some who tape and tuck,” and others who “try to chop it off.” Upon coming to a certain realisation about the “something” that is “wrong” and that is “of a sexual nature,” Tania said “I suppose really, the day you wake up and say ‘My God I’m a transsexual!’ might be the day when you say ‘Oh well it is my penis [that is “wrong”].’” From that point on, Tania described her relationship with her penis, suggesting that “you have this unique relationship with your penis in that you depersonalise it. Because when you’re on hormones, your libido drops off and you’re not ... sexually active and so ... [it’s] a useless appendage hanging there.” Further on the topic of her penis (again extending her experience to generalise across MTF transsexuals) Tania says: “we’ve always been at odds with our penis anyway. It’s like you’ve got this wonderful outfit on and you’ve got the wrong earrings. It really is wrong. ... It’s sort of like a congenital defect, and so you learn a lot of ways to disregard the penis.”

Tania is critical of the medicalization of transsexuality, and plans to use medical technologies strategically, suggesting that SRS risks reducing “woman” to the presence of a vagina. This would seem to present a challenge to any uncritical reading of transsexuality as a case of being “in the wrong body.” However, in the process of describing her own experiences leading up to identifying as transsexual, Tania talks extensively about her penis as something central to the feeling that “something is wrong.” How different can this be from the sense of being in the “wrong body”? And how reminiscent it is of Myra’s way of trivialising and progressively reducing (in physical size and symbolic importance) the presence of her penis! An overwhelming impression I gained throughout the interviewing process was of the degree of overlap

between the talk of those who had had SRS, those who chose not to have SRS, and those who were deciding to have SRS. In some areas there is hardly a hair's breadth between Tania's argumentation which leads to a decision to have SRS, and Myra's which leads away from that decision. Yet, in other respects, the difference between choosing to have SRS or not constitutes an enormous chasm; a chasm that has been reinforced by legal and medical procedures and criteria.

Conclusion

Transsexuals' decisions around opting for or against SRS, and medical professionals' decisions about what criteria are important in selecting applicants for SRS, have been played through a discourse of being "trapped in the wrong body" since the first attempts were made to conceptualise transsexuality as a psycho-medical phenomenon earlier this century. Some critics of the medicalisation of transsexuality suggest that transsexuals face a no-win situation: either they opt for SRS, thus investing in medical approaches to transsexuality and leaving themselves open to whatever interpretations (pathological or otherwise) may be read into transsexuality in the course of their lives; or they embark on a political journey, critiquing medical constructions of transsexuality, thus threatening the availability of whatever medical procedures they would like to access; or they choose not to employ hormonal or surgical means of bodily transformation and forego the possibility of attaining legal rights (and possibly social recognition) in their lived gender. Discussions of transgender politics which prioritise political challenges to the "gender system" or to medical constructions of transsexuality, may risk relying on over-simplified assumptions about the possible meanings of an individual's decision to accept or reject SRS. By critiquing the role of the wrong-body discourse in the medical construction of transsexuality, and in transsexuals' decisions about SRS, it is possible to envisage a more complex picture. This picture needs to take into account the sometimes contradictory relationships between a person's willingness to critique medical approaches to transsexuality, their decision to opt for SRS, and their feelings about their body years after that decision has been made. It needs to allow for avenues of political awareness and empowerment

that are not limited by one's perspectives on and experiences of sexed embodiment. Only then might transsexual and transgendered people develop a theoretical foundation for the political movement transgender texts envisage.

What I have been calling the wrong-body discourse is merely part of the convoluted discursive terrain through which transsexuality is currently constituted. This discursive terrain shapes and is reflexively shaped by, amongst other things, medical research on transsexuality, transsexual activists who advocate for access to SRS, transgenderists' critiques of the medicalization of transsexuality, some transsexuals' desire to pass, other transsexuals' conviction that being "out" is the superior political option, and many transsexuals' attempts to reconcile the sense that "something is wrong." Given this confusing array, transsexual bodies could be understood as a battleground for various competing discourses. From this point of view, it is possible to make sense of being "trapped in the wrong body." It is possible to see how the sense of feeling trapped might come about, and how it relates to the body. We could understand this as inhabiting a body which is the site of discursive struggle; the place where there is a battle between conflicting discourses. So perhaps being trapped in the wrong body need not be interpreted in terms of seeking a right body. Perhaps it is about finding ways to resolve for oneself in diverse ways the discursive struggle in which one is implicated - indeed, through which one is constituted - and which concerns one's body.

Transgender theorists are beginning to re-articulate what is transsexuality and to challenge the way medical institutions operate as sites of power where transsexuals are concerned. In this chapter, I began by arguing that conceiving transsexuality in terms of being trapped in the wrong body maintains medical constructions of transsexuality. I suggested that the wrong-body discourse thwarts attempts of transgenderists to politicise transsexuality and challenge aspects of medical approaches to transsexuality. Then, I questioned simplistic interpretations of what it might mean to seek SRS, drawing on interviews to indicate the complexity of the relationship between SRS and the wrong-body discourse. I concluded with the possibility that, if carefully theorised, the idea of being "in the wrong body" might be deployed meaningfully without constituting an investment in medical constructions of transsexuality.

PART FOUR: TRANSGENDER DIALOGUES

Transgendered people have been accused of making an individual choice instead of a collective, political one in the struggle against gender role oppression and of being completely apolitical or - worse - reactionary, because of reproducing gender stereotypes and passing. But applying the lessons learned from early feminism that the personal is political, with 'consciousness raising' around shared experiences and oppression, a process of politicisation began in some of the support networks and in the alternative therapeutic/social groups during the 1980s. By the 1990s the Transgender Liberation movement was born.

(Nataf, 1996, p.26)

In Part Three, I considered how transgender theorising may address psycho-medical⁵² approaches to transsexuality. The connections between transgender and queer theorising are the focus of Part Five. In Part Four, I ask: What is the relationship between transgender theorising and what the people I interviewed said about their lives and their strategic management of identities? How are the political aims of transgenderism carried out and talked about within transgender texts? What alliances and divisions does this create among "transgender people"? Who, according to these texts, counts as "transgendered"?

⁵² While it is problematic to group various specialist fields together under the term "psycho-medical", I do this in order to engage with the dialogue among transpeople and psycho-medical professionals. For further qualification of what I mean by "psycho-medical", see the introduction to Part Three.

In writing about transgenderism, I am writing about a complex and diverse set of political and theoretical agendas. Throughout Part Four, I frequently qualify and define which aspects of transgenderism are important for the issues at hand. However, there is one key distinction I wish to make at this early point. This distinction resonates throughout Part Four and is signified here by the terms “transsexual” and “transgender”. “Transsexual” agendas might prioritise access to SRS and other means to pass convincingly and absolutely as a wo/man. “Transgender” agendas might prioritise the possibility of crossing without passing; of validating points of transition and gender fluidity. I will not elaborate on this here, but will devote Chapter Eight to discussing aspects of these debates.

While sympathetic to transgender political aims (in terms of the political movement that seeks to empower those who are marginalised and the theoretical perspectives that challenge normative assumptions about “gender”), I offer a critical analysis of how these politics and theories are articulated. I want to look critically at who is included in transgender texts, how well transgender theorising “works”, and how well the forms of transgenderism articulated primarily in the U.S.A. might relate to transsexual and transgender people in Aotearoa / New Zealand.

In order to situate the transgender perspectives discussed within the following three chapters, we need to keep in mind the psycho-medical arguments with which transgender theorists are in dialogue. Psycho-medical approaches to transsexuality often rest on the assumption that “gender” is something that can be known, defined, and certain; that anatomical “sex” (male / female) maps onto psychological “gender” (masculine / feminine) in a one-to-one fashion; that (in “western” societies at least) there are really only two healthy / acceptable possibilities for “gender identity”: “man” and “woman” and that, particularly in adults, it is more plausible to alter the anatomical sex via surgery than to alter the psycho-social “gender” through psychotherapy.⁵³ These assumptions about “gender identity” impact on transpeople whether

⁵³ Ross (1991) claims that SRS is a treatment of last resort but brings excellent results when patients are assessed and diagnosed carefully. He also states that, while psychotherapy may be useful for “patients” who are distressed by their “condition”, “attempts to ‘change’ or to ‘cure’

or not they seek psycho-medical “treatment”. Much transgender theorising engages with and challenges these pervasive assumptions.

For those transpeople who do seek assessment for SRS, the specific terms of reference of the current DSM become relevant. Currently, within Aotearoa / New Zealand, eligibility for sex reassignment surgery is contingent upon the agreement by two psycho-medical professionals that the applicant meets the necessary psychological criteria. The official criteria, as outlined in the DSM IV (1994) under the title of Gender Identity Disorder, are listed below.

A) A strong and persistent cross-gender identification ... In adolescents and adults, the disturbance is manifested by symptoms such as stated desire to be the other sex, frequent passing as the other sex, desire to live or be treated as the other sex, or the conviction that he or she has the typical feelings and reactions of the other sex.

B) Persistent discomfort with his or her sex or sense of inappropriateness in the gender role of that sex ... In adolescents and adults, the disturbance is manifested by symptoms such as preoccupation with getting rid of primary and secondary sex characteristics (e.g., request for hormones, surgery, or other procedures to physically alter sexual characteristics to simulate the other sex) or belief that he or she was born the wrong sex.

C) The disturbance is not concurrent with a physical intersex condition.

D) The disturbance causes clinically significant distress or impairment in social, occupational, or other important areas of functioning.

(DSM-IV, 1994, pp.537-538)

these conditions are not particularly successful, although there have been some claims of short term success through behaviour modification” (p.92). The Oxford Textbook of Psychiatry (1996) states that the “most rational treatment would be to alter the patient’s conviction that he [sic] is of the wrong sex, but attempts to do so by psychotherapy rarely succeed” (p.508).

Implicit in these criteria is the assumption that the applicant is essentially a “he” or a “she” whose “sex” can be determined without doubt and in contrast to the “other sex”, of which there is only one. It also states that “sex” is something that one is born into, and that one’s sex may be perceived to be “wrong” (or therefore, presumably, “right”). Here, “sex” is knowable and certain; it is determined by the anatomy with which one was born. Although in the wording of the criteria, the term “gender identity” only appears in the title, it is reasonable to assume that notions of “cross-gender identification” and “desire to be the other sex” are also based on a discourse of gender identity. Ever since the conceptual differentiation between sexed anatomy and gender identity, transsexuality has been understood as a “disturbance of gender identity”. That the psycho-medical discourse of gender identity remains central to the construction of transsexuality may be inferred from the current nomenclature (“Gender Identity Disorder”). This discourse permeates psycho-medical literatures on transsexuality and provides the basis for an understanding of transsexuality as a case of incongruity between “gender identity” and anatomical sex. Here, gender identity is assumed to be an inner sense of being a man or a woman. Because of the privileging of mind over body, the gender identity is taken as the “true” identity, while the body is assumed to be “wrong” and may therefore require surgical alteration. As long as the mind/body binary remains unchallenged within psycho-medical discourses on transsexuality, the certainty and knowability of “gender identity” are crucial for the justification of SRS.

If accessing SRS requires one to “fit” the DSM criteria, to what degree is one required also to adhere to psycho-medical understandings of “gender identity”? Are the psycho-medical assumptions of the certainty and knowability of “gender” consistent with the understandings of “gender” articulated by transsexual and transgendered people? If psycho-medical understandings of “gender” are at odds with many transsexual and transgender persons’ understandings of “gender”, then how are these criteria useful except in the devising of a gauntlet that transsexuals must run to access SRS? For what purposes might it be useful to problematise psycho-medical assumptions about the certainty and knowability of “gender” and its relationship to “sex”?

Chapter Seven traverses psycho-medical constructions of “gender” as something which is identifiable, knowable, certain; and transgender discourses which describe

“gender” in terms of fluidity, mutability, uncertainty. Each of these constructions of “gender” plays a crucial role in arguments about the rights of transsexual people to access sex reassignment surgery and the question of how eligibility for SRS should be determined. I briefly outline the way transgenderism involves challenging the discourse of “gender-certainty”. I then introduce the work of two psychoanalytic theorists who challenge psycho-medical assumptions about “gender-certainty”. In this chapter, I explore the possibility that aspects of psychoanalytic theory may be useful to those interested in critiquing psycho-medical assumptions about “gender identity”. Here, I focus on transgender and psychoanalytic challenges to the psycho-medical insistence upon the certainty and knowability of “gender”.

In Chapter Eight, I discuss the thread of transgender argument referred to as the politics of “being both and neither”, and consider how this works theoretically and whom the both/neither stance appears to represent. In Chapter Nine, I consider who is included in transgender texts and how transgender theorising relates to local contexts. This chapter questions the applicability of transgender political challenges for indigenous peoples within Aotearoa / New Zealand.

CHAPTER SEVEN: GENDER CERTAINTY OR “GRABBING GHOSTS”

Introduction

I didn't want to be different. I longed to be everything grownups wanted, so they would love me. I followed all their rules, tried my best to please. But there was something about me that made them knit their eyebrows and frown. No one ever offered a name for what was wrong with me. That's what made me afraid it was really bad. I only came to recognize its melody through the constant refrain: 'Is that a boy or a girl?'

(Feinberg, 1993, p.13)

The quest for certainty: the assumption that one may be “known” to be a “boy” or a “girl”, the assumption that “gender” can be articulated so simply and conclusively, is pervasive. Uncertainty - not *knowing* - means that one is different, something is wrong. According to Feinberg's protagonist, not being able to *name* one's difference may mean something is badly wrong.

In Part Three, I elaborated on aspects of the psycho-medical construction of transsexuality, critiquing the rigidity and simplicity of the assumptions underpinning that construction. I alluded to the fact that psychoanalytic theory might allow a more complex theorising of transsexuality and the relationship between sexed embodiment and lived gender. In Part Four, I draw on various transgender arguments, suggesting that transsexuality / transgenderism may be an alternative way of “doing” gender, or a political stance, not necessarily a signal that “something is wrong”.

My main project in this chapter is to problematise the discourse of certainty underlying the psycho-medical construction of “gender identity”. In the course of this chapter, I describe some transgender political goals which are consistent with this project, I introduce the reader to aspects of psychoanalytic theory which have been used to complicate psycho-medical understandings of transsexuality, and I discuss relevant aspects of the interview transcripts. Questions implicated in this discussion include: What are the investments of psycho-medical professionals and of transsexuals in articulating ideas and experiences of “gender identity” through a language of certainty? Do transsexuals necessarily express such certainty about “gender” outside of the clinical setting? How can psychoanalytic theory inform a critique of the gender-certainty that underpins diagnoses of Gender Identity Disorder (GID) and acceptance for SRS? Can a critique of the certainty of “gender identity” be supportive of transgender political aims, even while unsettling the grounds upon which access to sex reassignment surgery is currently granted?

I conclude that a discourse of gender certainty is useful for transsexual people in some situations, but may be used without the question of sexual difference being completely foreclosed. The kind of uncertainty about the categories woman and man proposed through some psychoanalytic theorising is not inconsistent with some transsexuals’ talk about being a wo/man. In this respect, psychoanalytic challenges to psycho-medical reliance upon a discourse of gender certainty could potentially serve as a useful tool for transgender theorising.

Psychoanalytic approaches to transsexuality have, in the past, had a strong tendency to pathologise transsexuality and, even recently, have provoked considerable resistance from transsexual political activists (for example, Bornstein’s (1995) critique of Millot’s (1990) theorising as hostile to transsexuals). Nevertheless, some psychoanalytic theorists continue to challenge and reshape former (psychoanalytic) approaches to transsexuality. They attempt to provide a theoretical approach to transsexuality that challenges and complicates mainstream psycho-medical conceptions of “gender identity”, embodiment, and transsexuality, while also navigating a course between transsexuality as a mental disorder and transsexuality as a socio-political position.

Before launching into a discussion of specific psychoanalytic approaches to transsexuality, I would like to introduce aspects of transgender thought which indicate the utility of such a psychoanalytic critique of gender certainty.

To make sense of this chapter's title, I need to introduce Mimi. Mimi was perhaps the most articulate interviewee when it came to analysing what it might mean to be a wo/man. During our interview, she said:

I've been raised with the notion that gender is a very clear thing, but my experience doesn't tell me that. My experience says it's a very vague, very nebulous [thing]

...

at some times I'm actually aware of a multiplicity of aspects of myself. And some of those can be both the maleness and the femaleness and the genderlessness

Here, it is evident that Mimi, more than a decade after SRS, has not foreclosed the question of her own sexual difference. For her, living as a woman, being in a lesbian relationship, and having surgically acquired "female" anatomy, does not lead to any certainty about her "being" a woman. In an attempt to describe her path relative to concepts she called "male" and "female", Mimi drew several diagrams. In these diagrams, "male" and "female" looked to me like electron clouds. Mimi explained that "the reason I didn't draw it as a firm outline is because it's a fuzziness, it's not a concreteness [where] you can say: 'This is definitely maleness and this is definitely femaleness'".

Therefore, Mimi does not situate herself within the socially constituted category "woman", nor does she even subscribe to the fantasy that a clearly bounded space marked "woman" exists. For her the question of sexual difference is necessarily left open.

In trying to find a language for expressing the unknowability of “gender”, Mimi provided an insight which was to foreshadow my later interviewing experiences. I discovered that even those transsexuals who talked about being a wo/man with absolute certainty could not convincingly tell me what “man” and “woman” meant. As Mimi observed, this difficulty in defining what it is to be a wo/man extends well beyond transsexuals. She said, “my experience of observing other people is that most other people are rather fuzzy about their gender. Even though they say: “Yes I’m female”, when you try and pin them down, it’s sort of fuzzy. It’s like trying to grab a ghost.”

While Mimi’s words give us reason to begin questioning gender certainty, I am primarily interested in challenging assumptions of gender certainty in so far as I see such a challenge as being consistent with transgender aims. Here, I briefly outline how a critique of gender certainty is important for transgender aims. The transgender aims I refer to are as follows:

- ⇒ To challenge the idea that “woman” and “man” are the only viable and healthy gendered ways of being. Bornstein (1995) seeks to bring this challenge to the fore by celebrating the choice of living outside / between gender(s). Stone (1991) articulates this challenge by proposing that transsexual people seek a post-transsexual identity, thus refusing to conform with notions of gender as either / or.
- ⇒ To bring psycho-medical perceptions of transsexuality out of the framework where transsexuals are compelled to play a stereotypically gendered role in a clinical setting and argue they feel trapped in the wrong body in order to be perceived as good candidates for SRS. Stryker (1994) explicitly challenges the psycho-medical process of “treating” transsexuality with sex reassignment surgery by claiming that it is possible to opt for sex reassignment surgery without conforming to psycho-medical expectations of how one will live, post-surgically, in one’s re-sexed body. Bornstein (1995) vehemently opposes psycho-medical expectations that transsexuals lie about their pre-surgical lives in order maintain transsexuality (and therefore the still-controversial practice of sex reassignment surgery) in the closet.
- ⇒ To seek human rights considerations regardless of the relationship between their lived gender and sexual anatomy by challenging the assumption that a normative

one-to-one mapping is desirable. Feinberg (1996) argues that one should not have to opt for SRS in order to have the rights to identification papers and legal protections granted to any other citizen. Various authors point out that access to sex reassignment surgery is restricted by issues of health, sexuality, age and financial limitations, and therefore it is imperative that non-surgical transsexual and transgendered people are granted human rights (e.g., Riki Ann Wilchins in Nataf, 1996).⁵⁴

⇒ To challenge the idea that one ought to be certain of (read: static in) one's gendered ways of being throughout one's life. Numerous transgenderists celebrate, through their work, gender fluidity, mutability and uncertainty (e.g., Stryker, 1994; Bornstein, 1995; Halberstam, 1994).

Undermining the assumption that "gender" can be certain and knowable is potentially useful for each of these transgender political aims. The assumed certainty of "gender" rests upon the premise that "gender" consists of two mutually exclusive categories. Challenging the assumption of certainty implicitly brings into question the boundaries, construction, and "truth" of those gender categories. Unsettling the certainty of "gender" opens the way for conceptualising "gender" as more fluid and mutable, less static. If "gender" is no longer simply knowable and sayable, then how can there be a call for a one-to-one relationship between "gender" and sexual anatomy? And if that call is invalidated, upon what grounds could differential legal rights be accorded to transsexuals who have or have not had SRS?

However productive challenging gender-certainty might be for the transgender projects described above, it risks undermining other transsexuals' goals. For those whose most urgent goal in life is to seek sex reassignment surgery and pass unquestioningly as a wo/man, the certainty of "gender identity" offered by psycho-medical discourses represents a welcome oasis. The certainty of medically constructed "gender identity" offers the relief of having a place to call "home", a name to articulate

⁵⁴The very notion of human rights is fraught with complexities which I do not explicitly discuss in this thesis but whose implications for transgenderism are currently being debated by legal theorists. See, for instance, Currah (1997).

what feels so terribly “wrong”. Undermining that certainty, bringing into question the process whereby transsexuals are deemed eligible for SRS, may appear to jeopardise that which many transsexuals have fought so long and hard for: the right to live as the “other sex”, the legal rights of that sex, the means to “pass” (whether in the gym or the gynaecologist’s clinic), and access to legitimated medical procedures which provide the basis for legal and social aspects of gender transition. The different approaches to such medico-legal issues provide a source of tension between what I am calling “transsexual” and “transgender” political agendas.

A Psychoanalytic Critique of “Gender-Certainty”

Aspects of psychoanalytic theory provide an approach to transsexuality which highlights the risks and implications of psycho-medical assumptions about the certainty and knowability of “gender”.⁵⁵ Two authors who contribute to the reading of psychoanalytic theory on transsexuality in this chapter are Charles Shepherdson and Catherine Millot.⁵⁶ Millot, a practicing psychoanalyst in France, provides a Lacanian reading of transsexuality (1990). Shepherdson (1994) presents an informative reading of Millot’s work on transsexuality, and demonstrates how a psychoanalytic approach to sexed embodiment is useful for theorising transsexuality.

Of central importance in Shepherdson’s thesis is the distinction between the “body” and the “organism”. While psychoanalysis acknowledges the subject is wrought through biological and socio-historical effects, its primary concern is with the way the

⁵⁵ I would particularly like to thank Patricia Elliot for her contribution to my understanding of the psychoanalytic approach to transsexuality discussed here. Aspects of this chapter have been informed by our work together (Elliot and Roen, 1998).

⁵⁶ Millot and Shepherson both write explicitly about the role of gender-certainty in the psycho-medical construction of transsexuality. Other works which explore the question of certainty and sexual difference are referenced by Shepherdson (n.32, p.184).

subject comes into being. According to psychoanalytic theory, “the identity of the subject is not given at birth, but has to ‘come into being’” (Shepherdson, 1994, p.167), and this occurs through a process of signification. The “body” is that which is born through the process of signification, while the “organism” is the biological / organic aspect. Millot argues that science assumes transsexuals want to change their organism (anatomical change) rather than considering changing their body; i.e., rather than seeking a different embodiment.

Another important distinction made by Shepherdson is that between sexual embodiment and gender role. Here “gender” relates to historically specific norms. These norms are expected to be taken up by bodies, according to whether those bodies are marked masculine or feminine. This marking - or sexual embodiment - is a process of representation which Shepherdson refers to as an inevitable human imperative. Hence, the focus of Shepherdson’s title on “*The Role of Gender and the Imperative of Sex*”: gender is understood in terms of roles taken up through socialisation, whilst sexed embodiment is understood as relating to representation. Of sexual embodiment, Shepherdson writes that this “imperative is, of course, taken up and ‘symbolized’ differently by different cultures ... but it would be a mistake to reduce ‘sexual difference’ to one more human convention, as though it were synonymous with what we usually mean by ‘gender’.” (Shepherdson, 1994, p.161).

Failing to acknowledge the importance of signification in distinguishing between the body and the organism - failing to recognise the role of representation in the process of sexed embodiment - enables psycho-medical professionals to intervene on the transsexual anatomy without considering psychoanalytic concerns.

According to Shepherdson’s reading of Millot, a distinction can be drawn between “true transsexuals” who “are identified with the ‘other sex’, and will consequently benefit from an operation” (Shepherdson, 1994, p.175), and others whom Millot refers to as “horsexe” - outside sex - which is a “phallic identification, in which desire has

become impossible” (Shepherdson, 1994, p.175). This, of course, assumes Lacanian theory of the phallus.⁵⁷

Shepherdson and Millot characterise “the transsexual demand” as “the demand for an exit from the question of sexual difference” (Shepherdson, 1994, p.171), and medical science participates in this demand by responding to transsexuality from a “conception of anatomy that presupposes a ‘natural’ version of sexual identity, thereby foreclosing the *question* of sexual difference” (Shepherdson, 1994, p.171). Millot points out that the transsexual demand is directed to the surgeon and necessarily shaped, ahead of time, by the discourses of medical science. This leads to the suggestion that science is a symptom of our society, with medicine displaying a kind of psychotic refusal of the symbolic order.

Shepherdson describes phallic-identified transsexuals as working from the fantasy that the “other sex” is not lacking; “this identification is marked by *certainty*” and “by a demand that seeks to eliminate the symbolic ambiguity that accompanies sexual difference” (Shepherdson, 1994, pp.175-176). Millot describes some MTF transsexuals as seeking to become “Woman” rather than “a woman”. These people are not psychotic, but if they went through SRS, there would be a risk of “a psychotic break” because surgery:

would deprive them of the one point of reference in relation to which they have established a subjective consistency. For them, an operation would replace a relation to the other (a symbolic link) however precarious, with a condition of ‘being’ that is ‘outside’ the symbolic, so that surgery ... would ... imprison them ... in a position of foreclosure which had been kept at bay only by this fantasy of the other sex.

⁵⁷The notion of the “phallic identity” relates to the process of becoming a subject. The psychoanalytic subject, in Lacanian terms, imagines either having or lacking the phallus, having necessarily given up the fantasy of being the phallus. Sexed embodiment (the attainment of a “body” through processes of signification and representation) is the result of the response to phallic loss.

(Shepherdson, 1994, pp.178-9)

So according to Millot and Shepherdson, the phallic-identified transsexual - s/he who seeks to become "Woman" (or "Man") rather than "a wo/man" - is in collusion with the psycho-medical institution. This collusion is made possible by the assumptions that one can be certain about "gender identity", that there are no symbolic factors to be taken into account, and that "gender identity" and its relation to sexual anatomy is simply knowable and sayable: that the client's request for SRS can be taken at face-value.

Having set up the parameters of his argument, located the "organism", the "body", "gender" and "sexual embodiment" relative to one another, Shepherdson reflects on how his position differs from the argument taken up by psycho-medical approaches. He argues that:

in so far as psychiatry seeks ... to intervene directly upon the body, as though the body were simply a natural fact, a bit of 'extended substance', which could be technologically manipulated like nature, psychiatry will in effect seek a shortcut round the entire domain opened up by Freud, a shortcut that would return to the 'natural body' and avoid the formative effect of the imaginary and the symbolic.

(Shepherdson, 1994, p.170)

The "shortcut" allegedly being taken by psychiatry is exactly that which many transsexuals themselves seek: the alteration of sexual anatomical features and legal gender-status, as though that surgical alteration of the genitalia signifies no more than any other form of plastic surgery. Indeed, during the workshop, the participants said variously:

Mimi: I think that people should have the right to change [anatomically] in whatever way they want, whenever they want throughout their lives - they have to live with the consequences of it of course, and not blame the people who did the surgery.

Tim: As far as cosmetic surgery goes, you can have your nose on the back of your head, so why should it matter about the little wee itty bit where your legs join onto the body?

Tim: You can have anything accented or taken away from except the little wee bits - it's just ridiculous!

Kal: I would love it if I could still have my penis and have it the same size and just get rid of my testicles and put a little slot machine in there.

Each of these research participants advocates freer access to surgical/anatomical change than is presently available. Although they do acknowledge the importance of making the right decision, and possibly having counselling to guide one towards that decision, they completely overlook the signifiatory importance of the anatomical changes being discussed. Here, quite clearly, the body in question is only the *material* body (the organism, in Shepherdson's terms). As matter, it is not even a coherent whole, but a series of "body-bits", any of which can apparently be altered to suit their "owner". Kal's flippancy in referring to a surgically constructed vagina as a "slot machine" gives a stark illustration of the body as crude matter which can be broken down into bits; bits that can be altered or exchanged for other bits, like pieces of machinery.

Although Kal's "slot machine" metaphor may seem crude, we must remember that the possibility of exchanging one body part for another - as though the body was a machine that could be fixed or remodelled - did not originate with Kal.⁵⁸ S/he is

⁵⁸ It is possibly not insignificant that Kal's metaphor also resonates with the psychoanalytic implications of a slot machine as something into which money is inserted. Nor, if one was to pursue this line of interpretation, would it be insignificant that Kal's primary source of income is through sex work. In this instance, however, I have chosen to highlight the mechanistic connotations of Kal's metaphor as this interpretation is consistent with a medical approach where bodies are composed of *parts* that can be altered.

echoing a discourse on bodies which has pervaded popular media for decades (s/he grew up in the era of the “bionic man”) and which is particularly salient to transsexuals. I was reminded more than once by research participants that the MTF’s penis provides the necessary bodily tissue for the surgical construction of her vagina. This has implications for Kal’s admission that s/he does not want to give up her penis for the sake of attaining a vagina. It is also a consideration for transsexuals who perceive self-mutilation to be a way of reducing their time on the surgery waiting-list. In both cases, the fact that the (often unwanted) penis provides tissue necessary for vaginal construction reinforces the sense of the body as composed of purely material parts which may be (ex)changed. It is likely that a surgeon or psychiatrist will talk with an SRS candidate about the mechanics of “sex-change surgery”, but to what extent are the signifiatory implications also likely to be discussed? The oversimplification of aspects of SRS may be exemplified by one interviewee who gave (without my prompting) graphic descriptions of the various phases of his phalloplasty operations. He then flippantly reduced the removal of his uterus, fallopian tubes and ovaries to the expression: “[the surgeon] chopped out all my girlie bits”. This interviewee was a highly articulate person who had trained in a medical field.

The research participants quoted above assume it is possible to know with certainty which body-bits to alter and how. This goes hand in hand with the certainty of psycho-medical approaches to transsexuality, whereas a psychoanalytic approach must bring into it “the *doubt* that inheres in every symbolic formulation of sexual difference” (Shepherdson, 1994, p.172). The psychoanalytic approach to transsexuality described by Millot hinges on a resistance to providing certainty. That is, psychoanalysis refuses to give answers, where psycho-medical approaches come with ready-made answers, which the applicant has only to repeat convincingly. With regard to transsexuals’ demands for SRS, Millot writes:

Transsexuality involves an appeal, and especially a demand, addressed to the Other. As a symptom it is completed with the help of this Other dimension - more especially, with that of the function of the Other’s desire. Lacan said that the neurotic symptom is completed during the analytical cure If the symptom is a signifier representing the subject, it

only becomes such by being coupled with another signifier - unknown, hidden, but assumed to be in the place of the Other, and constituting the hidden knowledge concerning desire. By not replying, the analyst who occupies this place leaves the question of desire open.

The transsexual, who is formed through assignation by the other - a doctor or psychologist - finds an obdurate and even fallacious response to the enigma of his desire when he encounters his Other in Science. The desire of the Other is no longer veiled, the verdict is pronounced: let him be operated on.

(Milot, 1990, pp.141-142)

In this passage, Milot contrasts the uncertainty, the refusal to foreclose questions of desire and identity within psychoanalysis, with medical science's persistent desire to provide an answer, a remedy, "truth". Milot points to the residue that is left over after the "answer" has been given. For, according to psychoanalytic theory, the attempt to "resolve" transsexuality by operating on the organism fails to address issues with the body: issues of signification. What kind of subject does the post-operative transsexual *become*? Medical science expresses little interest in this: follow-up studies are necessarily limited by difficulties in maintaining contact with post-operative patients over a long period of time, and medical professionals' assumptions about what constitutes a "successful outcome" of SRS. (See Abramowitz (1986) for detailed descriptions of sex reassignment surgery follow-up studies and their limitations). One criterion for assessing sex reassignment surgery applicants may be the likelihood of surgical "success", where success may be measured by a variety of factors such as maintenance of physical health, reduced incidence of suicide attempts, and absence of complaints or requests for reversal from the applicant. Therefore, the "residue" that Milot refers to may be of little or no interest in psycho-medical assessments of the success of SRS as a response to transsexuals' demands. Questions of signification, of *becoming*, hardly figure at all in the psycho-medical picture of transsexuality.

This psychoanalytic critique of assumptions of certainty challenges psycho-medical professionals as well as transsexuals themselves. Milot writes that, in their

“requirement of truth ... transsexuals are the victims of error. They confuse the organ and the signifier. Their passion and their folly consists in believing that, by ridding themselves of the organ, they can also be rid of the signifier which, because it sexualises them, also divides them.” (Millot, 1990, p.143). Here, Millot is critiquing a psycho-medical construction of transsexuality that makes assumptions about truth / certainty. “Transsexuals” insert themselves into this discursive construction of transsexuality in clinical contexts for the purpose of attaining SRS. But do transsexuals seek truth and certainty, or is the facade of certainty merely maintained to get through the assessment procedures? If, as Millot implies, transsexuals collude with psychiatrists in foreclosing questions of sexual difference, how are we to understand Kal’s desire to live as an androgyn and be ambiguously sexed? How does Mimi’s description of “gender” as “fuzzy” or ghost-like fit with Millot’s suggestion that transsexuals make the mistake of seeking truth and certainty?

In the conclusion of her book, Millot acknowledges the extent to which uncertainty and contradiction feature in transsexuals’ sense of being a wo/man. She writes: “[t]he idea that transsexuality is grounded in the conviction of being a man or a woman is one fallacious certainty that the evidence of transsexuals enables us to dismiss” (Millot, 1990, p.141); and: “[a]nalysis of dreams of those awaiting surgical transformation reveals that the step they are about to take provokes psychic conflict, and that their sexual identity is far from free of contradictions” (Millot, 1990, p.143).

In the present study, it did not require dream analysis to realise the level of uncertainty and contradiction experienced by transsexuals in their relationship to gender identification and sexed embodiment. In the non-clinical setting of interviews, some participants willingly talked about the conflicts and confusions involved in decisions around seeking SRS.

Millot is also concerned to suggest non-surgical responses to the transsexual demand. She writes that a “certainty that must ... be called into question is the notion that the transsexual *malaise* can only be remedied through sex-change” (Millot, 1990, p.41). She concludes her book with a reference to the possibilities offered by psychotherapy. Millot claims that, through various forms of psychotherapy, some transsexuals “come

to question their transsexual identities and their choice of sexual object, and, provisionally at least, give up the idea of hormonal and surgical transformation.” (Millot, 1990, pp.142-143). Despite my interest in Millot’s critique of surgical approaches to transsexuality, I find her comments on the benefits of psychotherapies disturbingly reminiscent of earlier claims about the success of “treating” homosexuality psychotherapeutically. Is the ultimate goal, for health professionals working with transpeople, to reach a point where the client has “given up on the idea” of undergoing bodily changes? Some transsexuals would, understandably, read this as a hostile approach.

If not undergoing SRS means not foreclosing the desire to become the other (or the desire for gender-certainty) then, from a psychoanalytic perspective “giving up the idea” of SRS may well be a favourable therapeutic outcome. However, some participants’ talk suggests it may be possible to undergo SRS without completely investing in notions of gender certainty. If it is indeed possible to achieve a certain kind of corporeal transition, without completely investing in notions of gender certainty, then from transsexuals’ point of view giving up on SRS may be far from an optimal outcome. Although clinicians may treat transsexuals as if their desire to become the other is foreclosed at the moment the GID diagnosis is assigned, participants’ talk about “gender” suggests otherwise. The very refusal to foreclose that desire is evidenced by participants’ ambivalence about the categories wo/man. No post-surgical interviewee appeared in the interview to believe they had “become” the other. But this does not necessarily mean, as Millot suggests, that these people would be better off undergoing a psychotherapeutic process that resulted in their giving up on SRS. From listening to interviewees and reading Millot’s argument, I suggest that many transsexuals do perceive benefits⁵⁹ from SRS without necessarily being seduced by medical notions of gender certainty. But the question remains: what does SRS **mean**,

⁵⁹ I concede that what post-surgical transsexuals say about the “benefits” of SRS must be understood as partially a product of the effects of commitment and consistency. The enormous amounts of risk, pain, effort, and money involved in undergoing SRS necessarily cloud transsexuals’ post-operative perceptions of its “success”.

if it does not mean to the transsexual what it means to the surgeon? What does it offer, if not a pathway to freedom from anxiety about the question of sexual difference?

My concern here is to explore ways of thinking about what SRS means that critique psycho-medical assumptions about what it means. However, my wariness with Millot's conclusion about the merits of psychotherapeutic methods (through which the transsexual "gives up on" SRS) relates to the following question: does such a conclusion privilege what SRS means to the psychoanalyst over what it might mean to the transsexual? The fact that psychoanalytic theories have, in the past, pathologised transsexuality enhances my wariness about Millot's conclusion, just as it has clearly enhanced transsexuals' wariness about psychoanalysis tout court.

Varieties of (Un)Certainty

If psycho-medical approaches to transsexuality demand certainty, and psychoanalytic approaches critique that quest for certainty, how does certainty feature in transsexual and transgendered persons' articulations of their gendered positions? Historically, it has been important for transsexual people to form very forthright statements about *really being* the "other sex", about being "trapped in the wrong body", and about always having felt like a wo/man "inside". The essentialist certainty of transsexuals' identity as a wo/man was the initial key providing access to psycho-medical legitimisation and medical technologies. The evolution of these essentialist expressions of certainty can be observed through transsexual autobiographies (Bates, 1997, pers. comm.). Also, as I have already mentioned, it is important for some transgenderists to publicly proclaim their uncertainty about, or their ambiguous relationship to, "gender" in order to destabilise psycho-medical constructions of transsexuality and challenge societal prejudices against gender non-normativity. Here I will discuss in more detail aspects of the interviews and workshop where the participants' relationship to gender-certainty becomes evident through what they say.

While some participants sought to question the particular variety of certainty demanded by psycho-medical professionals, for all participants certainty about their (trans)gendered identities (had) played some role at some time. For example, some participants talked about the certainty of psycho-medical discourses and of gender-labels as providing signposts along the way through their transition, and being a source of comfort. Here “knowing” became important. This “knowing” appeared in various ways. Some talked about always having known they were, or should have been, male (Babe, Pat). Others talked about the crucial discovery that there was such a thing as transsexuality. For example, during Myra’s interview, she described how making connections with concepts of transsexuality provided a sense of “knowing” which offered some security at a time of confusion. Myra said, “as soon as I could ..., understand what the hell was going on inside my head and my feelings, and as soon as I learnt that some of these things are actually conceptually correct, in the sense that they’re acknowledged, then it just all sort of made sense.”

For Myra, the discovery of “transsexuality” as a word and a concept legitimated through psycho-medical research provided a welcome sense of certainty. The certainty or “knowledge” about transsexuality provided through psycho-medical texts initially enabled Myra to make sense of her feelings. She adhered to assumptions of certainty in so far as she sought the validation that what “was going on inside [her] head” was “conceptually correct”. Some years later, however, Myra continues not to seek SRS, to identify as transgender, and to be critical of psycho-medical assumptions that sexual anatomy and lived gender ought to map, one-to-one, onto one another.

For Ami, “gender identity”, or the sense of being a woman was described as “a knowing”. As she talks about this, there is certainty about this “knowing”, but some uncertainty about how to put it into words. Ami said:

‘woman’, to me, ... [is] how I’ve felt all my life ... that’s how I choose to live ... in a gender identity sort of way ... At times it’s kind of how I feel too... For me ... it’s really hard to define ... um ... it’s just a knowing. ... I know how I feel inside. And knowing as growing up as child; I knew how I

felt then really strongly ... but didn't quite ever talk about it. And not knowing truly what it was either.

Although, for Ami, being a woman is “a knowing”, she freely acknowledges that this need not have implications for sexual anatomy. Ami has recently undergone SRS but describes this transformation as “cosmetic”, suggesting she is well aware that her “knowledge” of herself as “a woman” is not contingent on psycho-medical legitimization.

During the workshop, there was some discussion about the role of the certainty provided through labels: man, woman, transsexual, transvestite, transgender. Some participants suggested that such certainty is important early in the transition, but becomes less important as time goes by. For Mimi, those labels which had been useful signposts eventually became unnecessarily restraining. For Sarah, the ideal was to live within the bounds of such terms, whilst for Kal the ideal was to disrupt and live outside those bounds. Here is an excerpt of their discussion with one another:

Sarah: ... I've felt all my life that I was a girl and I should have grown up to be a woman and my body did not conform with my image of what I was and so I changed my body.

Mimi: A few years ago I would have said the same, but I've moved on from that point to where now I don't feel like that.

Kal: And that's how I felt for four and a half years until I realised that there is such a thing as an androgyn and, hey, it's a whole new world!

Sarah: No, I was very uncomfortable in the in-between stage.

.....

Mimi: I guess when I first started going through the whole idea of changing and everything, I needed those identities {man / woman} to have some idea of where the hell I was going. But having gone through that, I've now had time to look at 'me' more closely and decide that I didn't actually need those identities and it would have actually been better for me had I known that I didn't need those identities from the start.

Sarah: I disagree with some of what you say but not the rest. One of the big things for me was knowing that there was such a thing as transsexuals and 'my God, I'm not the only person that feels that her body is wrong'. And that there was a label was very helpful when I was trying to find myself, and that there were several labels, and that I could test myself against several labels - transvestite, transgender, transsexual and see how I measured up to those. [That] helped a lot to further define what I was. And then of course find ... there's a classic transsexual category that everyone of us has a little bit of but [none of us] absolutely totally fit[s] every bit of the mould. And ... I went through the change and then I shrug my shoulders and think: 'well all along I was only "Sarah"', and I perceived myself as a woman and now everyone else also perceives me as a woman. And that's what matters. It no longer matters at that point what those categories were, but without those categories, I don't think I would have known enough to start finding who I was. So I think they are helpful. I think they are necessary signposts.

Mimi: I was thinking of the male / female categories as in 'woman' is this particular image, and I thought I had to strive for the image in order to be a woman. I thought of myself as being a female in a male body and I thought in order to achieve what I felt, in order to balance what I felt inside, that's what I had to aim for. But in going there and reaching there, I found that I'd actually gone too far over and I needed to come back.

To some extent, Mimi and Sarah are talking at cross-purposes, in that Sarah is talking about the importance of transsexual / transvestite / transgender categories, while Mimi is questioning the usefulness of man / woman categories. Meanwhile, Kal attempts to step outside of all these terms by describing herself as an "androgyn", by which she means: "the in-between stage of a transsexual", which does not imply that she is necessarily going to make a "transition" to wo/man, but that she chooses to live publicly and subversively outside of those terms.

Both Mimi and Kal have, in the past, subscribed to an image of "woman" which they felt compelled to strive for. Realising that they could live with their various trans-

identities without striving to be a “woman” provided them with a sense of freedom and choice. Among some transsexual and transgendered people this may be understood as a process of developing political awareness: the goal is no longer to attain a sense of certainty of oneself as a woman, but to critique the categories wo/man. The political hierarchy which may be established here will be discussed in the following chapter. Sarah, in the conversation above, seemed to have to work particularly hard to express her ideas. She was constantly at risk of being interrupted by Kal who had an endless supply of angry and humorous anecdotes about her/his adventures as an androgyn. Sarah was also at risk of being positioned as one who is lagging behind in understanding of “gender”: both Kal and Mimi referred to having effectively *been through that stage* when Sarah first began talking about the importance to her of identifying as a woman.

Whilst the certainty of wo/man as identities is seen as dubious by most participants, the importance of attaining some certainty about one’s transsexual / transgendered identity is a different story. It is here that the role of psycho-medical institutions becomes contentious. On the one hand, psycho-medical professionals offer information, support, surgery and hormonal treatment. They may also provide validation of one’s position as transsexual and / or as a wo/man. On the other hand, psycho-medical professionals police access to these facilities, potentially excluding those who are too honest about their own sense of uncertainty or gender ambiguity. Participants in this research readily told me of ways in which they had purposely avoided (or would avoid) telling a psycho-medical professional about any doubts they were harbouring or any details that might otherwise mitigate against their application for medical services. Tania, who was perhaps the most forthright about this, said “if at the end of the day, you’ve got that op - you don’t care, you play whatever game [you need to]. And a lot of us are very flexible and ... we’ll do or say what it takes to get what we want from the system.... You learn from one another what the doctors want.” In a similar vein, Mimi said, “my experience with the [gender clinic team] was that I felt that I needed to satisfy them in order to get what I wanted. And whether what I wanted was what they wanted or not didn’t matter”. And Sarah said:

the medical people I dealt with had very little knowledge of what transsexuality was about, and there was quite a clear idea in the medical practitioners' and psychiatrists' views of what a transsexual should be like, and in some ways I conformed to their image and in some ways I didn't. But I knew that I wanted surgery - that was going to be the good thing for me - and if that was the game, then I'd play it.

So, as others have documented (Stone, 1991; Billings and Urban, 1982), transsexual people are well aware of what criteria psycho-medical professionals work from and will strategically conform to those criteria in order to get what they want. This effectively means that the research based on psycho-medical case studies - the research that uses the language of gender-certainty - is brought into question. Although transsexuals often seek psycho-medical professionals for services and for affirmation about their gendered identities, there is much evidence to suggest that the **uncertainties** about being a wo/man are most unlikely to ever get aired in the psychiatrist's office.

Ultimately, many of the participants resorted to a discourse of "being yourself" over and above "being a wo/man". This is alluded to by Sarah (in the longer excerpt above), and was brought up by Babe, who is perhaps the most adamant of the interviewees about "really being a man". Interestingly, even those who tried to argue that they were one hundred percent certain about being a wo/man, found it very difficult to tell me what it is to be a wo/man. Babe was unable to answer my question at all until I turned it around and asked what it is about "not being a woman" that appeals to him.

How might readings of the interviewees' talk be informed by the psychoanalytic insights discussed earlier in this chapter? Perhaps Babe's inability to tell me what a "man" is (besides the aspect of sexual anatomy) demonstrates the importance of the unarticulated (unknowable / unsayable) symbolic aspects which are sexed embodiment. Ami's description of surgery as a "cosmetic plus" could be read to indicate her awareness of the difference between the body and the organism. Although lacking the psychoanalytic terminology to articulate this idea fully, she possibly realises that being

a “woman” has little to do with either physical characteristics (the organism) or outward appearance (dress and mannerisms), but is of deeper symbolic significance.

Various participants’ talk about the need for them to present to psycho-medical professionals as stereotypic transsexuals indicates their awareness of the inadequacy of psycho-medical understandings for describing transsexuality. As Sarah pointed out, the “classic transsexual category” never completely describes any transsexual; there is inevitably something left over, something unarticulated. Could this be what Millot refers to as the “residue” that remains when the organism has been attended to but the body ignored?

Millot suggests that SRS fails to address the symbolic issues at the heart of transsexuality by attending to the organism but not the body. I argue that this view does not adequately account for the diversity of meanings attached to SRS from the point of view of individual SRS candidates. Nor does it seem to acknowledge the diversity and fluidity of positions explored by those individuals post-SRS. Certainly, from the clinician’s point of view, it is the organism that is undergoing change. But from the transsexual’s point of view, SRS may variously hold the symbolic weight necessary to allow them to live as a wo/man and / or provide them with a differently-embodied perspective from which they may critique notions of gender-certainty and of “becoming a wo/man”. Perhaps it is the symbolic potential of SRS that Sarah alludes to when she says:

Sarah: ... To undergo sex change is a huge thing, it changes absolutely everything about you - about your identity -

Tim: I don’t see why it should do. For me personally I think that you should be at that point where surgery and alteration of ones body is neither here nor there.

Mimi: By the time you have it.

Tim: Yeah.

Sarah: Yeah, by the time you have it perhaps, but it is a huge road and a rocky road and a mentally exhausting road to go

....

Sarah: My goal wasn't surgery, that was a necessary step along the road. My goal was to live as an ordinary woman, and I had a route there that was different from your route there - I wanted to be that at the end, and ordinary women don't mix in transsexual circles and mixing with transsexuals to me can be quite painful and it reminds me of all the shit that I went through, all the trauma and I don't want to be reminded of all that. I've been through it, it hurts, it was painful, it wasn't much fun, and I've been through it and now I don't want to be reminded - I want to expunge that...

Sarah momentarily refers to SRS as the key event which “changes everything about you”. She qualifies her comment quickly because of the opposition it meets. For the others who speak here, SRS does not foreclose the possibility of desire, but may enable them to explore (from a differently embodied perspective) a multiplicity of gendered ways of being. Sarah had clearly gone through considerable (and painful) transition prior to having sex reassignment surgery. As Tim and Mimi suggest, such transition would be necessary in order for sex reassignment surgery to matter, i.e., for SRS to take on the signficatory weight it has for Sarah rather than being merely an anatomical change. There is some contradiction in the way Tim articulates this, which is interesting considering he had not undergone any surgery at the time. He effectively argues that sex reassignment surgery could cease to matter, if enough preparatory transitional work had been done. However, for Sarah, perhaps sex reassignment surgery did mark the symbolic transition she needed to effect in order to take up her position as a “woman”. For other transsexuals, sex reassignment surgery may not carry that symbolic potential.

While psychoanalytic theory may be employed to critique psycho-medical approaches to transsexuality, I consider Shepherdson and Millot's propositions about what SRS might mean to transsexuals represents a weak point in their discussion of the symbolic significance of SRS. If, as I perceive, they suggest transsexuals necessarily operate under the illusion that change at the level of the organism will foreclose the question of sexual difference, then I think they are underestimating the creative potential for making sense of SRS in numerous ways. Perhaps, provided the individual concerned

realises that SRS is only one step along the path, in Ami's terms merely a "cosmetic" aspect, and provided that individual does the preparatory emotional work towards living as a wo/man, then sex reassignment surgery can mark a symbolic transition which enables that person to live as a wo/man without necessarily implying the foreclosure of desire. Sarah, who recognises SRS as "a huge thing [that] changes everything about you", also acknowledges that in her quest to live "as an ordinary woman", SRS was merely a "step along the road". For Sarah, then, SRS seems to mark the symbolic transition enabling her to live "as an ordinary woman". For the psychoanalyst or psychiatrist, therefore, the question remains how to determine to which sex reassignment surgery applicants this does **not** apply. Here, I concur with Shepherdson and Millot's argument that current psycho-medical diagnostic criteria overlook the symbolic so absolutely as to fail to address this question.

Most interviewees freely offered to talk about the uncertainty of their identities as wo/men. The few who explicitly talked with great certainty, did so in a way that left gaps: especially when asked to tell me *what* it was they were certain about. Those participants who talked about the uncertainty of the concepts woman and man, acknowledged that they had thought in terms of greater certainty in the past and / or had talked in terms of certainty in psycho-medical contexts in order to get what they wanted. For some, certainty about (trans)gendered identities was an important step, providing security and a sense of understanding. However, it eventually became possible and important to critique that certainty in some cases.

My conclusion from this is that for transpeople a sense of "knowing" oneself (as transsexual/transgendered or as a wo/man) may be important without the question of sexual difference being completely foreclosed. It is this sense of knowing that is articulated by transsexuals seeking SRS. This *knowing* can be framed, for the benefit of the psychiatrist, so that the question of sexual difference appears to have been foreclosed. However, outside the clinical setting many transsexuals (particularly those who are some years post-transition) willingly admit to the uncertainties about their lived "gender". These transpeople, although not articulate in the psychoanalytic terminology required to discuss the signifiatory aspects of sexed embodiment, do

refer critically to “gender” as something that cannot be simply known or defined. Some of them also describe themselves as “multi-gendered” (Mimi) or as “both and neither” (Jim).

Conclusion

The notion which I have been calling “gender-certainty” represents a foundation stone for the ontologising of “gender” and therefore of “transsexuality”. In this chapter, I have discussed various responses to and critiques of a discourse of gender-certainty. I have been particularly concerned to challenge the role of this discourse within psycho-medical constructions of transsexuality, drawing on certain psychoanalytic critiques. But, for a critique of psycho-medical adherence to gender-certainty to work, the gate-keeping role of psycho-medical professionals has to be taken into account. Any theoretical understanding of lived gender or sexed embodiment may be plausible on an intellectual level, but when applied to the case of deciding who is eligible for SRS, which theoretical models actually “work”? Making a “wrong decision” about SRS is perilous whether one is working from a psychoanalytic perspective, a behaviourist perspective, or the perspective of the transsexual who will do or say almost anything in order to get what s/he wants. Here it is easy to see the appeal of a model that provides a sense of certainty and knowability about “gender”. Yet, because of the dominance of this model, it is also the most likely model to come under attack.

Transgender theorists and activists who critique psycho-medical understandings of the two-gender model, without challenging the simplistic framework within which it operates, risk making claims about “gender fluidity” that leave many transsexuals out in the cold. This can be exemplified by Bornstein’s “us” and “them” approach where one is either a gender outlaw or a gender defender, thus allowing one’s relationship to “gender” to persist as an organising feature. In this chapter, I have demonstrated how psycho-medical understandings of gender-certainty may be problematised through a psychoanalytic approach. In the next chapter, I discuss the various motivations of

transgender and transsexual people for situating themselves as wo/man or as both/neither.

CHAPTER EIGHT: THE EITHER/OR VERSUS BOTH/NEITHER DEBATE

[W]hen we walk into a restaurant and we see another transsexual person, we look the other way, we pretend we don't exist. There's no sly smile, no secret wink, signal, or handshake. Not yet. We still quake in solitude at the prospect of recognition, even if that solitude is in the company of our own kind.

(Bornstein, 1995, p.60)

Staying in the closet, whether it's a lavender closet or a leather closet or a gender closet, just doesn't work. Our enemies ferret us out. They won't allow us to remain hidden. We have a choice between becoming more public and fighting for our right to exist, or being marginalised until we are dead or invisible.

(Califia, 1996, p.28)

Postmodern articulations of the question, to pass or not to pass, are central to transgender / transsexual dialogues of the nineties. According to some transgenderists, passing as the “other sex” is the ultimate sell-out. Here, passing is portrayed as complicit with normative gendering and therefore as opposite to the gender-transgressive ethic of transgender politics.

Earlier in the thesis, I have described transgenderism as seeking to challenge various aspects of the psycho-medical construction of “gender identity” and of transsexuality. In this chapter, I contrast the radical politics of gender transgression and the liberal politics of transsexuality as a human-rights issue. In setting up the debate in this way, I am effectively implying the existence of two discrete political approaches taken up by two discrete groups of people. This is not the case at all. But I will begin with the exposition of these alternative positions and then seek to complicate this opposition.

Contemporary transgender politics are informed by postmodern conceptions of subjectivity, queer understandings of sexuality and gender, radical politics of transgression, and poststructuralist deconstruction of binaries (such as man/woman and mind/body). According to these politics, "passing" (as described by Bornstein in the epigraph above) may mean falling prey to the forces of "gender oppression" (MacKenzie, 1994). However, subversive crossing, public and politically strategic trans-gendering is seen as one step on the road toward gender transgression, gender transcendence, and (ultimately) ridding the world of "gender oppression". For some, this necessarily entails the disruption and eventual abandonment of categories such as "woman," "man," and "transsexual".

By contrast, a more liberal transsexual politics may not strike at the roots of psycho-medical constructions of transsexuality, or "gender identity", but may be more concerned with the human rights of the person who "is transsexual". Here, the person's identity does not come into question in the same way, but their legal rights and their rights to access medical services are central issues. This is a curious brand of identity politics where the object is to obscure the question of identity. One does not proclaim oneself proudly as a life-long "transsexual." One moves into progressively less threatening identity states such as "formerly transsexual" and, ultimately, "woman" or "man". Here, it is assumed that the transsexual person will want to seek SRS, that s/he will want to pass full-time as a wo/man, and that s/he deserves the legal rights (access to identification papers, marriage license etc.) of any other wo/man.

These two political positionings are not mutually exclusive and both rely at times on human rights discourse. Any one person may adhere to aspects of each line of argument simultaneously. Both seek greater societal acceptance and legal rights for transpeople. However, the former seeks acceptance for gender transition and gender ambiguity whilst the latter seeks acceptance for the practice of living as "the other sex". The former seeks to destabilise and expand the categories "woman" "transsexual" and "man", while the latter seeks ways for "transsexuals" to be accepted as "wo/men".

The two strands of trans-politics I am describing here appear to participate in the construction of a political hierarchy: a hierarchy whose message infiltrates transgender (and queer) theorising. The message that permeates transpolitics and theorising effectively states that crossing is more trendy, more radical, more exciting, and more politically worthy of merit than passing.⁶⁰ A version of this appeared in the previous chapter when Mimi and Kal suggested to Sarah that they used to feel as she does about the importance of passing, but have now moved on to feel differently. The implicit message is: "I've been there, but now I've progressed to this stage of political awareness". This is effectively an accusation of false consciousness. It also implies that there are gender "stages" which, in a modernist sense, are progressive and linear. However, among transsexuals seeking SRS, the reverse of this accusation can occur. One transgendered interviewee recalled attending a transsexual "support" group where other participants clearly understood transsexuality as constituted through exclusivity. Tracey reported that at the start of the meeting: "one of [the other transsexuals] came in and the first thing she said to me was 'go back to the closet!'" Here, those who are working actively toward passing and gaining access to SRS and those who are "successful" at passing are "real transsexuals" while anyone else is "just a cross-dresser", who is still "in the closet" and is possibly an embarrassment. Another interviewee suggested that such transsexual "support" groups "don't work because you feed into one another's psychosis, and you just mind-fuck one another" (Tania). She recounted her experience of a meeting where "one of the guys ... one of the 'girls' (ha ha!) was really ugly". Tania acknowledges that this "sounds really cruel", but justifies the comment by describing the effect it seems to have on the group as a whole, and the way that it undermines other group participants' attempts to do femininity "successfully". She elaborates, saying:

when you're sitting in a room full of people in dresses who are trying to look stunning - trying to look nice - and there's this bony person sitting there with a balding head ... you kind of think 'My God, what are you

⁶⁰ See Martin (1994) for a more detailed critique of the political stance which privileges crossing over passing. Martin develops this critique as a feminist objection to aspects of queer theorising.

doing?’ (ha ha) ‘Wanna take you out and shoot you!’ (ha ha) because you know amongst yourselves that you are trying to maintain a standard and she’s not pulling it.

Clearly, from the perspectives of Tania and Tracey their respective support groups operate from either/or assumptions about transsexuality. The expectation is that transsexuals want to pass as wo/men. Those who are too obviously “both/neither” do not “count” as transsexual.

In this chapter, I characterise the discussion between these two broadly conceptualised political positions as the “both/neither versus either/or debate”. “Both/neither” refers to a transgender position of refusing to fit within categories wo/man; while “either/or” refers to a transsexual imperative to pass convincingly as either a man or a woman. Thus, I am focusing on the differences and tensions between these positions. I discuss how the interviewees situate themselves in this debate and interrogate aspects of transgender theorising. My concern here is to ask how useful transgender theorising is in analysing this debate. Is there adequate acknowledgment of transsexual positions or is transgender theory primarily about invalidating (as not politically aware) those transsexuals who pass? How might transgender theorising be enhanced by a more eclectic politics rather than reinforcing an “us and them” hierarchy?

Transgender Perspectives

While I think there is an interesting development of a politicized identity ... I am interested in where this leaves those of us who choose to live as men (or women) and unambiguously lay claim to the rights and obligations of those positions. ... I’m wary of the ‘queering of transsexualism’ and I’m wary of any theoretical position that tries to turn transsexuals into some vanguard of the ‘Gender Revolution’. Most of us are just trying to live our lives.
(Henry Rubin, 1995, pers. comm.)

*A word of warning to the 'monomorphs': the transgender menace
is among you and we recruit!*

(Nataf, 1996, p.58)

While Rubin and Nataf's comments (above) represent diverse points along a political spectrum, I focus on arguments which diverge from one another in more subtle ways. Prosser (1998) states that "[p]rominent writers in the transgender movement all emphasize passing as politically incapacitating", citing Bornstein, Feinberg, and Nataf as examples. I highlight aspects of Bornstein's and Nataf's arguments, for the sake of the present discussion.

Bornstein is one transgenderist who clearly sets out to make transsexuals into vanguards of the "Gender Revolution". In "Gender Outlaw", Bornstein wages war against "gender terrorism"; i.e., the social pressures enforcing gender normativity through violence against those who trans-gender. She tries to make this a simple issue of "us" and "them", where "we" are the gender outlaws, and "they" are the gender defenders. However, there is some unacknowledged confusion about exactly where she draws the line between the outlaws and the defenders. On the one hand, she explains how many transsexuals fear recognition, hiding even from each other for the sake of exposure. This "silent" majority of transsexuals appears committed to maintaining the "gender system". On the other hand, she lists post and pre-operative transsexuals (along with "transgenders", she-males, drag queens, out transvestites, and "closet cases" - "transvestites who hide their cross-dressing" (p.68)) as "gender outlaws". So, there is some ambiguity as to whether the "silent majority" count as outlaws or only serve to maintain the "gender system". Later, Bornstein refers to this newly constructed "us" as belonging generically to "categories of transgender" (p.69), arguing that to divide gender outlaws into categories is impossible. Bornstein writes that to "attempt to divide us into rigid categories ... is like trying to apply the laws of solids to the state of fluids: it's our fluidity that keeps us in touch with each other. It's our fluidity and the principles that attend that constant state of flux that could create an innovative transgender community" (p.69).

Given Bornstein's overall argument, resisting the division of gender outlaws into categories makes sense. But how does it represent the politics of those transsexuals who do not wish to be clustered with other categories of transgender? Do these transsexuals have any voice within the "community" Bornstein depicts? She tells the reader: "I really *would* like to be a member of a community, but until there's one that's based on the principle of constant change, the membership would involve more rules, and the rules that exist around the subject of gender are not rules I want to obey" (p.69). But to what extent would a "community ... based on the principle of constant change" appeal to or include those transsexuals who seek to pass unproblematically, to be(come) the wo/man next door? For whom does Bornstein propose to stand?

Interestingly, in a later chapter, Bornstein clearly designates passing transsexuals as gender defenders or non-supporters of the "revolution in deconstructing gender". As to who would support such a "revolution", Bornstein writes: "Supporters of a movement to deconstruct gender might be found within groups of people who are looking beyond gender for identity - some more liberal or radical segments of the S/M and bisexual communities, for example, or radical queer elements who want to do away with the rigid codes of gender and sexuality" (pp.133-134). Here, she redefines transgender to encompass those who share "the stigma of crimes against gender" (p.134). So transgender - formerly defined to include closeted transvestites and passing transsexuals - now includes all gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transpeople who are potentially perceived as violating "gender codes". Bornstein suggests that, if "transgendered" means "transgressively gendered", then it is more inclusive and represents a larger group of "supporters". Yet, passing transsexuals have already been described as "non-supporters" of the revolution Bornstein envisages. She has also already discussed ways in which aspects of lesbian and transgender communities would be most unlikely to form an allegiance. So what is the purpose here: to envisage the largest group of people who could be loosely defined as "gender outlaws", or to define a group of people who might plausibly want to be regarded as the "us" Bornstein stands for? In either case, it seems that Bornstein gets caught out playing her own numbers game. And she fails to account for the resistance she will meet in trying to stand for others through the construction of a "we" who are the "gender outlaws".

Bornstein describes “belonging to gender” as being similar to belonging to any social or cultural group. She points out that “belonging to gender” is more like being part of a cult with regard to how difficult it is to “leave gender” and how many pressures there are to conform to gender norms.

In a cult ... day-and-night participation is often a requirement for continued membership. Similarly, within the cult of gender, members are required to weave the continual maintenance of the cult into their daily lives.

(Bornstein, 1995, p.103)

For Bornstein, therefore, living as either/or constitutes an investment in the system that perpetuates the oppression, through silence and invisibility, of transpeople. She argues that the “either/or” of gender operates as a control mechanism. For Bornstein, passing “becomes the outward manifestation of shame and capitulation. Passing becomes silence. Passing becomes invisibility. Passing becomes lies. Passing becomes self-denial.” (p.125). While this analysis of the power dynamics which maintain “gender” is important, it seems perilously close to accusing passing transsexuals of having false consciousness.

I agree with Bornstein’s analysis of gender as a control mechanism, and think it is important to articulate these arguments in terms that both privilege transsexuality and are accessible outside of academia. As someone who has identified myself politically and publicly as “queer”, I empathise with Bornstein’s quest for bringing transsexuality out of the closet. However, I am wary of the risks of a too hasty and insufficiently careful critique of passing. If passing is cast as the politically incorrect - as the path of lies and self-denial - what does this say about transpeople who, for whatever reasons, choose to pass? What does this say about transsexuals who pass selectively, carefully managing their male, female and trans identities? How does Bornstein’s critique of passing merely reinforce hierarchies of political correctness, thus creating another set of restrictive gender norms? What is the point of articulating a politics that potentially denigrates those for whom it claims to be liberatory?

In the course of discussing her concerns about the political deployment of “queer”, Judith Butler challenges the promotion of “outness”. Here, “outness” means being “out as [identity label]”. Since the evolution of transsexual and transgender politics has been concurrent with queer (poststructuralist) critiques of identity, using transsexual/transgender terms as identity labels is necessarily problematic. As discussed through Bornstein’s text, transgender people cannot easily be divided into meaningful identity categories. Nor does it make sense to depict “transsexual” or “transgender” as categories, for these terms are far too broad and mobile. Butler discusses aspects of this problem with reference to identity politics in general. She acknowledges that it is important to use identity categories for political purposes, but also to remember that we cannot always control how the meanings of those labels and categories will change over time. Therefore, it is important to be aware of the risks of identity categories. Butler writes that although

identity terms must be used, [and] as much as ‘outness’ is to be affirmed, these same notions must become subject to a critique of the exclusionary operations of their own production: For whom is outness a historically available and affordable option? Is there an unmarked class character to the term, and who is excluded? For whom does the term present an impossible conflict between racial, ethnic, or religious affiliation and sexual politics?... In this sense, the genealogical critique of the queer subject will be central to queer politics to the extent that it constitutes a self-critical dimension within activism, a persistent reminder to take the time to consider the exclusionary force of one of activism’s most treasured contemporary premises.

(1993, p.227)

So perhaps bringing a queer critique to Bornstein’s notions of transgenderism and promotion of “outness” will be informative to transgender theorising (and this is precisely what I suggest in Part Five). Perhaps Bornstein’s mode of approach to transgender politics also goes some way to explaining the wariness of things “political” expressed by those transpeople I interviewed.

Some transgender and transsexual people, who prefer not to be “out”, are forcibly outed; for example, through being the victim of transphobic violence or through unsought media attention to legal battles. These transpeople may then be held up as vanguards of the gender revolution. Perhaps having one’s position proclaimed as politically salient has more to do with being in the wrong place at the wrong time than to do with “political awareness”. The esteemed both/neither stance is sometimes not sought, but imposed upon transpeople.

What is needed, therefore, is a way of bridging the gap between Bornstein’s radical politics of outness, and Butler’s concerns about the uncritical valuing of outness. An author who goes some way to bridging this gap is Zachary Nataf.

Nataf (1996) presents various transpersons’ insights on transgenderism. Nataf attempts to be sensitive to the diversity of (trans)gendered subjectivities and political perspectives, while acknowledging the kinds of political hierarchies that have come into being within trans-communities.

In the 1990s, alongside queer direct action groups such as Queer Nation and Lesbian Avengers, transgender direct action groups like Transgender Nation, Transsexual Menace and Transgender Rights ... were set up in direct response to the transphobia experienced by transsexual people daily. Being out and proud versus passing has become the measure of the political consciousness and commitment of transgendered people, but the option of being out of the closet without serious repercussions in their lives is still not possible for many.

(Nataf, 1996, p.29)

Like Bornstein, Nataf acknowledges the political importance of visibility and the need to bring transsexuality out of the closet, thus exposing the oppressive power relations that construct transsexuals’ “closets” in the first place. Like Butler, Nataf is sensitive to the risks of outness, and the social and economic factors determining who can afford to be “out”.

Nataf describes the social changes that might eventually occur through increased transsexual visibility in envisaging a politically empowering third-gender space:

Third sex/gender does not imply a single expression of an androgynous mixing ... The third gender category is a space for society to articulate and make sense of all its various gendered identities, as more people refuse to continue to hide them or remain silent on the margins. ... If more transsexual people were able to identify as transgendered and express their third gender category status, instead of feeling forced to slot into the binary because of the threats of punishment and loss of social legitimacy, that third category would be far more peopled than one might imagine. People could be given legitimacy by this third category, if society recognised gender diversity alongside ethnic or religious diversity.
(Nataf, 1996, pp.57-58)

The “third gender” Nataf describes is one version of the both/neither position. Nataf, like Bornstein, seems to envisage a gender revolution occurring through the proliferation of genders. The first, and most obvious, problem with this is hinted at in Nataf’s last sentence (above). If “gender diversity” were as well “recognised” as ethnic or religious diversity, how much would actually have been achieved? Very little, if the long-standing and well-entrenched prejudices amongst ethnic and religious groups is any indication. As Butler observes, simply promoting diversity does not deal with problems of discrimination, prejudice, and related inequities. “Gender oppression” will not disappear through the mere proliferation of genders.

According to Nataf, one of the aims of transgenderism is “to be truly inclusive and to unify the entire community around the common issue of gender and in defence of our human rights” (p.31). This goal-statement privileges community and human rights aspects of transgenderism over the radical politics of outness. From this statement, it would seem likely that Nataf is not about to take up an “us and them” stance. However, he does identify ways that rifts occur among transpeople. For instance, one

of the transgenderists Nataf quotes identifies the selective availability of SRS as one factor creating divisions among transpeople. She argues:

[i]t used to be that we were all gender trash rejects together ... when we started to get empowered for having sex change surgery all of a sudden the distinction between post-op and pre-op became extremely important, as a postoperative you got certain privileges and power.

Essentially surgery breaks down for me as a class and race issue. People who are economically empowered and want surgery, get it. Which means, essentially, people who are white and educated and largely middle class ...'

(p.31, Nataf quoting Riki Ann Wilchins)

If, as Tania and Tracey's experiences suggest, some transsexuals regard access to SRS, and effort to pass, as measures of the degree to which one "counts" as transsexual, and if Wilchins' observations about access to SRS are accurate, then is the question of who "counts" a question of "race and class" as much as a question of outness? This suggestion also harks back to Butler's comment that the possibility of being "out" could be partially dictated by issues of class and race.

So, to reiterate the central concern here: two hierarchies are established through transsexual and transgender discourses. Transgenderism (the both/neither stance) exalts "outness", fluidity and transgression. Therefore, who counts (as a "gender outlaw") depends upon how possible it is to be "out", and this in turn could depend upon class, race, ethnicity, religion etc. Who gets to count as transsexual (in the sense of the either/or stance) rests on who can pass, which depends partially on who has access to reassignment technologies, and is therefore influenced by class, race, education etc. This suggests that the both/neither position **and** the either/or position are problematic in terms of exclusivity and their failure to account for socio-economic factors.

Research Participants' Perspectives

If I began this chapter by implying that transsexual politics of “either/or” and transgender politics of “both/and” operate as discrete or mutually exclusive arguments, the interviewees’ comments will surely expose this as a fallacy. Throughout the interviews and workshop, research participants engaged in the debates which are the focus of this chapter. For many, the acknowledgment that one was both/neither seemed important, though only one participant sought currently to express this in public fora. For some, shifting between a sense of being both/neither and being a wo/man seemed to be part of the on-going process of living a transgendered life. For others, there was an adamant refusal of any connection with both/neither politics.

Kal was undoubtedly the most outspoken of the research participants when it came to asserting her/his right to be both/neither. S/he had numerous stories to tell about her/his attempts to bring about political change through living as an “androgyn” or a third sex existing outside of the categories “man” and “woman”. One of her/his subversive manoeuvres is to refuse to categorise her/himself for others’ convenience. S/he turns the obligation to label back on the other person. Kal said “when it comes down to [people asking me] ‘what would you like to be called?’, [I say] ‘you make the decision, and you then can’t blame me!’”. Recently this caused some concern at an educational institution where Kal was trying to enrol. Upon telling administrative staff that s/he wished to enrol without ticking either the “M” or the “F” box, Kal describes how the concerned enrolment officer “asked me what would I wear to class. And I said ‘clothes’. She said, ‘I mean would you come as {female name} or as {male name}?’ [To which I replied] ‘whatever I feel like putting on is what you’ll see me in,’ and I said, ‘believe me, it will be above here and below here - don’t worry about the rest!’ I didn’t get accepted into the course.” This is one example of the barriers faced by transgender people who publicly choose a both/neither identity.

During the workshop, Mimi seemed intrigued by Kal’s insistence upon maintaining an androgynous stance. Mimi had already indicated that her sense of having to present herself as a woman had diminished over time. Mimi explains:

I guess it's come to a stage in my life now where I feel I don't need to prove to everybody that I'm a woman. When I first started going through the change, I felt that I needed to wear make-up and high heeled shoes and stockings and skirts and dresses and all the rest of the stuff, and have very good control of my voice and mannerisms and behaviour and the way I moved and walked and all of that. But as I became more confident in who I was as a person, those postural things I found no longer necessary.

However, Mimi said that to some degree she still felt forced to choose. She said, "I feel like I'm forced because of social conditioning to choose one or the other. I can't be anywhere in between and be well-accepted within society and function well in society, so I sort of have to choose."

Mimi has developed a strategy for dealing with the tension between her personal ambivalence about fitting well into the category "woman", and her sense of being obliged to make a definite choice. This involves selectively coming out to people (to reduce her sense of being obliged to pass as a woman), thus enabling her to talk more freely about her past. This is in contrast with Bornstein's depiction of passing transsexuals as constantly living a lie. As Mimi said:

if I meet people and decide: yes you're someone that I'm likely to want to be friends with, then I'll let them know straight up because it makes it too difficult for me if I have to police what I say. If it's people that I'm just going to occasionally meet and not going to deal with them over long term, then I won't tell them.

Tim pointed out repeatedly that being FTM meant he was in a significantly different position from the others in the workshop. Perhaps this is well exemplified by his stance in the current debate; a stance so flexible as to appear almost contradictory. On the one hand, he is concerned to pass as a man and be accepted as such, and he is surprised at Mimi's suggestion that she intends to come out to those she is working with. But on the other hand he acknowledges the importance of "owning" both masculine and feminine aspects of himself, and thinks that male/female labelling on

identification papers, forms, and even public toilets should be eradicated. Tim also said "I identify as just being me ... just for the simple reason that gender changes and there's no point in categorizing myself as this, that, or the other. [I] just go with the flow." Perhaps he can afford this degree of flexibility because it has been so relatively easy for him to pass or, as he described it, to "fit into the straight heterosexual stream of things - with the blink of an eye - off through the turnstile." Thus, he has no personal incentive to live as both/neither, but will casually discuss how ridiculous is the imperative to live as either/or.

Tania also appeared to take up a contradictory stance. She wrote on the questionnaire that she was neither man nor woman but a unique combination, yet during the interview she spent considerable time describing the lengths she went to to pass as a woman. She said "there are women who I would like to emulate. I look at them and I think, well what is it that I want to emulate about you? And they always seem to have a presence about them. They fill the room." On the other hand, Tania says that she is creating her own way of being, with the understanding that others will fit in around her. She explains:

I can't call on a common sisterhood between you and myself and say 'these are the things where you and I come together and therefore we're sisters'. I can't do that. I can call on all that I know, all that I've experienced, and define myself in relation to the rest of the world, and then have other people fit in around me. This whole 'feminine' buzz, I've got to internalise it first and make sense of it for me and then go out there ... and say 'well this is what I am, who I am, now work out where you fit around me as best you can'.

When I expressed my confusion about the apparent contradiction between her both/neither politics and her efforts to attain a distinctly either/or presentation, she said:

I know that I'm a combination of both, but it's not as if I'm going to go around with a sign on my head with 'transsexual' [on it]. All [on-lookers]

are going to perceive me as is one or the other. To them there is no transgender option. For them there are just the two choices. But for me there is a private third choice and that's a combination of the two.

Here, the self-perception as both/neither is clearly a private choice, and it is this very aspect of privacy that distinguishes Tania's articulations of being both/neither from Bornstein's. For Bornstein, the whole purpose of taking up a both/neither stance is publicity: publicising and making visible the power relations that keep transsexuals in the closet and that maintain oppressive gender relations. For the interviewees, however, it was a quest for personal truth that took priority over public action. Describing oneself privately, to me as an interviewer, in terms of being both/neither was an attempt to articulate the personal sense of being in between or in transition. Here, the sense of both/neither is clearly distinct from a political statement.

Tania explained: "I don't feel the need to feed into any big political thing and hold myself up as a role model." Babe also made the comment that: "I don't have to make political statements to be happy about being myself." He elaborated, saying that: "I'm not saying [transgenderists can] stand for me. They can do whatever they want. But I just accept myself the way I am." Bornstein's visions of transgender community may crumble under the overwhelming response of transpeople who refuse to articulate their sense of both/neither in political terms. Yet, as a researcher working with transcripts of interviews with transsexual people, I can see how tempting it is to read their comments through a highly politicised lens. It would be very easy to quote and discuss transcript excerpts as political statements, some of which would appear to support both/neither politics. But in order to represent the quotations fairly, I must also discuss their context. These statements about identity were often articulated in the context of an explicit refusal of the "political".

Not needing or wanting to "be political" was a recurring theme. Jim suggested that he could empathise with the urge to be politically out as both/neither, but he thought that urge was driven by exhibitionism and that no amount of care in articulating a both/neither stance would prevent some observers from squeezing one into the either/or framework. However, privately, he perceives that "we're both and we're

neither, transsexuals; we're both and we're neither." He even elaborated on this, saying "for want of a better word, yes, I'm a transsexual. I will be a transsexual til the day I die. In fact when I'm dead and under the ground and my bones dry out and someone will come and look at my bones later and they'll see just a woman's bones." Here, as with Tania (above), the both/neither talk is produced in the name of expressing an underlying truth; a truth that goes all the way through Jim's existence, right down to his bones. Jim explained his choice to live as a man (while perceiving himself as both/neither) by saying:

I don't think that I fit in being a man either. I still feel ... not belonging ... not belonging. But I'd rather be seen as a man because there's no way I could be a woman. I mean, when I was a woman [people] thought I was a man and thought I was different or I was a lesbian or I was something, but I wasn't a woman. At least I'm dressed comfortably - I dress the way I want to - and people see me, my mannerisms and everything, people see me as a man.

So, for Jim, being "both and neither" is about knowing aspects of oneself that others cannot see: knowing that one's biology is (or bones are) "female", knowing that no matter how one dresses one has difficulty being received as a woman, and knowing that one prefers to live as a man.

Myra reiterated, more often than any other interviewee, the point that she did not want to express her transgenderism in a public / political forum. Nevertheless, in her private life, she is perhaps the interviewee who has lived with the most gender-ambiguity for the longest time. (Myra had begun at least twenty years ago to present herself visibly, outwardly, and purposefully in ways that challenged others' reading of her as a "man". At the time of the interview, Myra had been taking hormones for seven years and had been appearing as a woman in some aspects of her life and as a man in other aspects for at least this long.) She identifies as transgendered, arguing that there is no need to have SRS. Myra is still working up to, "going one hundred percent of the way" which, for her, means living full time as a woman and does not imply any moves towards

surgery. Despite Myra's attitudes towards transition - her private views imply a both/neither stance - Myra is adamant about her non-political orientation, saying:

I'm not rebellious. ... I'm shy. I am a back-room person. ... I've watched parades go by but I've never bothered to pluck up the courage to join in. I don't need to. It's nice to see other people articulate [political views], but I'm quite happy to just be myself my own way without needing to overstate anything or upset anybody or be flag-waving.

She began making these comments about not being "rebellious" before I asked her about her feelings toward transgender politics. When I did begin to talk explicitly about transgenderism as a political movement, she pointed out that those were the very sentiments psycho-medical professionals could be checking for in their assessment of transsexuals. It had appeared to her that the psycho-medical professionals she saw sought some kind of assurance that she was not living a transgendered life for political reasons. Perhaps it is here that Bornstein's both/neither politics connect most closely with the both/neither stances of some of the interviewees.

Many transpeople, whether or not they consider themselves as part of a transgender political movement, are likely to seek psycho-medical services at some time. It is in this context that the quest for maintaining a personal truth meets with the public realm. It is in the psychiatrist's office that each transperson must crucially decide whether to express their sense of being both and neither. The visit with the psychiatrist is bound by rules of confidentiality, as were my research interviews. This visit is far from the realm of media publicity and political "outing". Yet, in so far as the success of the psychiatrist's visit determines the client's access to technologies required for passing, describing oneself as both/neither in this context may constitute a "public" statement. In the psychiatrist's office, whether one is "Kate Bornstein" or "Myra", any expression of a both/neither stance may arouse suspicions about political involvement. It is here, as much as in their personal lives or in their (political) careers, that each transperson must decide just how they want to be "out", if at all. Given what is at stake during the psychiatrist's visit, it is little wonder that most transpeople are "closeted" about their both/neither sentiments, and those who do come out often do so long after SRS.

By the time I had heard Myra's comments against "being political" I was certainly becoming wary of what the "political" might constitute to those being interviewed. Clearly, what each of them was saying to me in the relative privacy of an interview was highly, and often radically, political (in terms of challenging hegemonic assumptions about "gender"). Yet very few of them wanted to perceive it as such. I was reminded of Bornstein's observations on why transsexual people might prefer to be silent and invisible, and the isolation of many transsexuals from one another which further reduces the likelihood that they will seek a political medium for expressing their views. During the workshop, Sarah said this was the first time she had been among other transsexuals for several years, explaining: "my goal was to live as an ordinary woman ... and ordinary women don't mix in transsexual circles".

It was difficult to ascertain, in the context of one-to-one interviews, the bounds of each interviewee's conception of the "political". But in the context of the workshop I was able to sit back and listen while the participants talked among themselves, gradually building a picture of what constituted the "political" and what obligation there seemed to be to "be political". Here is one thread of the discussion which relates to how each participant viewed their relationship to the "political":

Mimi: I guess I see myself as a role model in the sense that I participate in this [research] ... I've done my open political bit. No doubt there will come a time when I'll need to out myself at [my workplace], but I'll choose the time and place.

Tim: Why do you feel you have to do that?

Sarah: Yeah, why?

Tim: Because I, from my point of view, I live my life. I don't tell people unless they specifically ask me: direct and on the head. Most people are in oblivion.

Mimi: It depends on the situation. ... At [my workplace] I'm going to be there for at least five years. A lot of the people in that time, I'm going to see for the whole five years. It's very difficult to police what I say to them all the time. It's much easier at some stage to turn around and say: well, I

don't care any more. I'm just going to be me! You're just going to have to accept what I say. And that's basically what it is for me.

Kal: From a political point of view: Someone has to do it. But then again, you've got to make sure you're mentally strong enough that you can do it. The way I look at it: I've lost everything I could possibly ever lose. There's only one thing I've never lost and that's me. So now, it's time to be proud of who I am personally. I know I can deal with it. I know there's going to be a lot of struggle. I know there's going to be a lot of backstabbing or pain [but] I believe I can do it. ... Someone has to do it for everyone else that's coming up. Or else we're all going to still face the same issues time and time again. ...

Sarah: I went through in a very public way because [of my job]. And one year I changed who I was [in the public eye] and that was a very public thing to do, and I'm a very private person, and that was an enormous thing for me to have to do. Now, I've done my political bit there. I didn't do what I did to be a transsexual. I did what I did to be a woman. I've done my political bit. I just want to be the woman next door. So, sorry, I'm not doing any more!

Here, the “public” and the “political” go hand-in-hand. For each of the participants speaking above (as for Bornstein), being publicly transsexual is a form of political action. Sarah and Tim clearly do not want this kind of role and have never sought it, while Mimi and Kal take up this role to varying degrees. Kal aspires to a vision of social change through greater transgender visibility. Mimi seeks to be able to live her life, making small contributions to the wider cause, without making “outness” her *raison d'être*. Tim enjoys the anonymity that passing easily as a heterosexual man affords and cannot understand why Mimi would even consider outing herself to anyone. Sarah has been very “out” against her will and has been working hard for some years to retreat into the anonymity of the “woman next door”. It is interesting that Sarah feels the need to apologise for this! This is yet another example of how Sarah became positioned in the workshop when political issues were being discussed; in this context, not wanting to be out amounts to a position of false consciousness. For most of the workshop participants, it would seem that being political is defined by

being out and, even in Aotearoa / New Zealand where transgender politics are almost unheard of outside of academia, the hierarchy of transgender political activism seems to be in place.

It was also in the context of the workshop that I was able to ask more questions about each participant's visions of social change. Kal said that there should be the option of identifying legally with an intermediate gender option, to which Mimi added that there should be a legal option of both/neither. There seemed to be general agreement that a psycho-medical procedure requiring one to live for two years "in the post-transition gender" was highly problematic in its assumption that a post-transition gender could be attained at that stage. As Kal said: "You can't live as a woman. You can perceive yourself as a woman for two years. And I think that's one thing they need to change when they say you have to live as a woman for two years because you're not, you're living as a transgendered person that [means] getting a lot of crap." Sarah recounted her experiences of "living as a woman" for two years prior to surgery, adding:

and then I had other hurdles put in front of me that I found really quite awful. I had to provide evidence that in the community I was living in I was accepted and doing OK as a woman. And then I had to show that I was performing, not [just] 'OK' [but that] I was above average performance in my job, with all this sort of crap going on! And none of the guys I work with had to show that they were above average, and none of them had to show evidence that they were fitting into their local community OK. And I don't think it's so bad now but [I had to do] all of this to get the OK to go to another country to have [SRS]! I couldn't get it done in NZ, and yet I had to do all these things!

Clearly, each participant was highly aware of his/her own aspects of both/neither. Reducing the conceptual possibilities to either/or seemed to be little more than a game dictated by psycho-medical professionals. Making changes to the psycho-medical constructions of transsexuality (and thereby making changes to the policing of transsexuals) were central aspects of the future-visions suggested by the participants. Outside of the workshop context, Mimi also suggested:

I think our society needs to be challenged in its identification of gender. ... However, my perception of ... society and the depth of the entrenchment of gender polarity is that I don't think in a thousand years it's going to make [much] difference. I think what you'll end up with is ... a group in the middle, but they'll always be identified as the freaks.

I sense that this comment made by Mimi reflects the views of most of the research participants: that societal attitudes towards transsexuality do need to change, but it is going to be a very slow process; and that understanding oneself as both/neither may be personally important but political activism based around this will never remove the stigma from those who live as both/neither.

Although I was pleasantly surprised by the willingness of the research participants to talk about their lives in terms of both/neither (while simultaneously minimising the “political” implications of that) this line of thinking was by no means unanimous.⁶¹ The oldest person I interviewed (Jean) described gender-categories in a way that arguably conforms to a more rigid conceptualisation. She made the two following comments, which sit together most ironically:

I think that people who are transgendered ... should be able to interrelate with each other but there's too much cattiness and bitchiness and jealousy. But if they could communicate with each other, I think that would make a big difference.

...

⁶¹ I say I was surprised by this, not because I had assumed the participants to be politically ignorant, but because most of my contact with transsexuals' talk about their lives prior to the interviews was through autobiographies. The agenda with many transsexual autobiographies for some time seems to have been to maintain a stereotypic image of a simple transition from a wrong body to a true self (although this may be changing).

I've come across transvestites who think that they're transsexual and when you say 'well do you want your cock cut off?' and they said 'no,' and I said 'well you're not a transsexual!' They're just confused, that's all.

In the first comment, Jean is referring to a vision of trans-community where there is open and friendly communication about trans-issues. This would seem to be consistent with an aspiration to promote understanding within a diverse group of people, and maybe even develop some political goals. However, in the second comment, Jean undoes her own good intentions by drawing firm lines (between transsexuals and transvestites) which divide trans-communities, and suggesting that people who sit on the boundaries are simply “confused”. How friendly communication could be fostered through such an admonition as Jean describes herself having given some unfortunate transperson is a mystery. For Jean, social change is about changing societal attitudes. This may be done through direct communication and by being out as transsexual. In terms of her role in this change, Jean said that she had at times felt obliged to “help people with their confusion” by being out as transsexual and thereby educating others. Whilst Jean’s approach to this “education” appears rather didactic, when I went to interview her, she did suggest *I* could probably teach her something about transsexuality, not just the other way around. (And then I could not get a word in edgewise for the next two hours!)

Although I can read various interviewees’ positions in terms of transgender politics, that does not mean their motivations for articulating politically radical ideas have anything to do with an interest in social change. As Myra suggested, as far as social change was concerned, society only really needed the “occasional nudge”, and she was happy to leave that job up to other transgenderists.

Perhaps a more persistent motivation than any vision of social change is the urge to find a place to call “home”. For some, that place comes in the form of a word or social group to identify with. For others, it may come in a decision that “being oneself” is more important than passing. As Ami said: “it’s actually important for me to be me. ... You can try and pass which really makes your life harder. ... For my mental health and

sanity [it] is important mostly that I go out and be me, so I don't have to deny anything. I don't have to lie about things or feel like I'm hiding something." But as Mimi observed: "no matter how far we go to[wards social] change, it's not going to change the basic deep-rooted sense that there are two sexes."

Conclusion

Transgenderism is a political movement seeking to challenge the belief that every person can be categorised simply as one of two sexes. One political strategy instituted by transgenderists has been promoting transsexual visibility and, in particular, encouraging transsexuals to be "out" as both-and-neither. This both/neither stance has come to be privileged over passing as women and men (i.e.: being "closeted", or having "false consciousness").

Being "out" is necessarily difficult for all and impossible for many, yet it is often taken as the measure of transgendered political awareness. To what extent, then, may transgenderism be reminiscent of Bornstein's critique of "cults" (and particularly gender as a cult)? Perhaps this variety of transgenderism, in seeking to fight the "gender system", institutes its own set of group norms whose maintenance requires constant vigilance on the part of its members. And what of those transsexuals for whom it is, for a myriad of socio-economic reasons, impossible to be "out"?

The impossibility and/or undesirability, for many transpeople, of being "out" as transsexual or transgendered is one reason why not all transpeople can claim their trans-identities as loudly and proudly as Bornstein does. Wariness about transgender politics may also be due to concerns about which aspects of one's "identity" are foregrounded, and which are obscured, through transgender politics. The possibility that some articulations of transgender politics and theorising obscure racial and cultural identity is explored in the following chapter.

Transgenderism is ostensibly a movement that attempts to address the concerns of a wide community of people who live non-normatively gendered lives. Transgender

communities and identities get described, with postmodern flair, in terms of fluidity and diversity. But to what extent is transgenderism *working* for the “silent majority” of transsexuals, if those people are left feeling they must apologise for their lack of public political commitment to the cause? If outness is the measure of transgender politics, then those politics are severely limited. If being a “gender outlaw” is the most highly esteemed position in transgender communities, then what is being assumed about the power of such “outlaws” to represent other transsexuals? The transcript material produced in the course of this research suggests that the “silent majority” of transsexuals has good reason to stay silent: not because they lack political aspiration or vision, not even because being “out” is beyond their realms of possibility, but because they do not wish to be represented by “gender outlaws”.

CHAPTER NINE: FIGURING RACIALLY MARKED BODIES INTO TRANSGENDER THEORISING.

Introduction

Queer theories have been variously criticised for their ethnocentrism (Goldman, 1996; Danuta-Walters, 1996; Hennessy, 1995; Lee, 1996) and their lack of careful attention to the lived realities of transsexual and transgendered people (Namaste, 1996). In the course of this decade, a forum is being established for the reworking of “queer” from the position of transgender activism. But, how well does this reworking address concerns about ethnocentric theorising? Where are people of racial “minorities” situated in transgender theories? Despite the claims of inclusiveness of both transgender writings, do perspectives of whiteness continue to resonate, largely unacknowledged, through transgender theorising?

In this chapter, I present a discussion of transsexuality which foregrounds cultural identity rather than “gender identity”. In doing this, I challenge concepts of queer and transgender, usually revered for their all-inclusiveness, as to how well they work cross-culturally.⁶² I illustrate the points made in this chapter by drawing from the transcripts of interviewees who belong to cultures indigenous to the South Pacific. Although I am basing my argument on details that apply to this specific geo-political context, the implications of this challenge to ethnocentrism in queer and transgender theorising extend well beyond the South Pacific.

⁶² In this chapter, I am not focusing on the relationship between “queer” and “transgender” which is in itself somewhat problematic. That discussion occurs in the following two chapters. Here, I work from an assumption that queer and transgender agendas are broadly similar (at least with regard to their cultural and academic situatedness).

Through this chapter, I pose questions about the role of transgender theories in providing discursive alternatives to western medical constructions of transsexuality. Because of the complex language that is required to discuss the intersections of these topics discussed here I ask you, the reader, to allow me some flexibility in my uses of the terms “queer”, “trans”, “transpeople”, “transgender”, and “gender liminal”.

I am reluctant to subsume Maaori transpeople within the same terminology as Pakeha transpeople, especially in cases where there is obviously a desire to foreground Maaori political and cultural identities over (trans)gender identities, and where pursuing those Maaori political goals includes developing a critique of Pakeha conceptions of the relationship between sexed bodies and lived gender. Because I am loathe to simply refer to these Maaori people as transgendered, I employ the term used by some anthropologists working in this area: gender liminal⁶³.

Throughout this chapter, I tend to refer to ‘race’ rather than ‘ethnicity.’ The factors influencing this decision are discussed by Australasian feminist theorist Lynne Alice (1991). “Ethnicity” has been embraced within sociological writings, as a term which reaches beyond the biologism of race, incorporating aspects of culture. However, Alice suggests that “ethnicity” also “obscures or ignores what Tangata Whenua want to say about their identity. The slide from ‘race’ to ‘ethnicity’ perpetuates the cultural values of the dominant Pakeha: ‘ethnicity masks white hegemony’ (Ballard, 1987)” (1991, p.64).⁶⁴ Alice argues that while the term ethnicity

⁶³ Besnier (1994) employs the term “gender liminal”, particularly in reference to Polynesian peoples, arguing that “the notion of liminality ... captures many attributes of intermediate-gender status in Polynesia” (p.287). Some of these attributes are described by Besnier as the “betwixt and between locus”, the “outsider status and social inferiority” and the “affinity with performance and rituals of reversal” characteristic of gender liminality in the Pacific (p.287).

⁶⁴ Tangata Whenua is the Maaori term for indigenous people. It can be understood literally to mean “people of the land”.

allows diversity, it ... ignores the demands of indigenous peoples to recognise their decolonised identities. The problem is that 'ethnicity' denies the preference of some indigenous peoples to use a language of 'race' which legitimates their first-nation status, a status quite different from other 'ethnic' minorities.

(p.65)

That is, the term “ethnicity” implicitly assumes that “there are many equal-but-different minority groups” (p.65), an assumption that I seek to avoid through this chapter where I foreground the perspectives of gender liminal Tangata Whenua / Tagata Pasifika⁶⁵. It is with this in mind that I write of “race” rather than “ethnicity” in a chapter which challenges transgender and queer theorising to address questions of race, indigeneity, and colonisation. I use “race” to foreground the struggles of indigenous people who may be silenced through the language of “ethnicity”. It may seem, however, that there are problems with relying on the language of “race” (a term which resonates with connotations of the biological, the ontological, the “natural”) in the context of a thesis where such ontologising is rigorously critiqued. I overcome this problem by emphasising that the “race” I write of is explicitly politicised. I use “race” strategically (like “queer”), with an awareness of its history and a sense of the importance of reworking the term.

As there is already extensive debate and discussion around the politics of “race / ethnicity” terminology, I wish only to signal my connection with this debate and then move on. Kobayashi and Peake (1994) discuss the discourses of “race” and “gender” in geography, presenting an illuminating summary of three ways of conceptualising these terms: (i) race and sex as biological facts, (ii) race and gender as social constructs, and (iii) “race” and “gender” as political constructs (p.232). It is in the third sense that I employ these terms throughout this thesis. Finally, Alice (1991) reminds us that “although analysing race relations in terms of biology reinforces

⁶⁵ Tagata Pasifika may be translated simply as “people of the Pacific”. As I understand the term, it privileges indigenous perspectives and has specifically political connotations regarding the reclaiming / revaluing of indigenous cultures of the Pacific.

racism, simply replacing 'race' with 'ethnicity' does not deal with the oppression of indigenous peoples. When they use the term 'race', it means something very different from its [depoliticised] use by Pakeha" (p.66).⁶⁶

Anthropological research documents numerous examples of non-western cultures where concepts of gender liminality are accommodated through available gender roles (eg: Nanda, 1990; Roscoe, 1987 and 1991; Besnier, 1994). The relationship between this aspect of anthropological study and research on transsexuality and transgenderism has complex implications for the various parties involved. On the one hand, a romanticised version of third-gender acceptance within non-western cultures can provide images of hope for transgendered people fighting gender oppression. Besnier (1994), critical of such romanticising of Polynesian acceptance of gender liminality, comments on the risk of assuming that gender-phobic⁶⁷ attitudes are purely colonial phenomena. He writes: "explaining violence against liminal individuals as the sole result of emergent modernity in the Pacific Islands presupposes a romanticised view of Polynesia that has no validity outside the western imagination" (p.560, note 47).

On the other hand, through the processes of westernisation (via colonisation), it is now not uncommon for gender liminal persons to seek SRS even though they live within a cultural context where their gender liminality might formerly have been understood in terms of a way of life rather than in terms of corporeal change. For some gender liminal people, however, it is important to maintain "traditional" cultural values by resisting identification with (contemporary western) medical discourses on transsexuality. For other gender liminal people, particularly in contexts where little

⁶⁶ Pearson (1989) and Spoonley, Pearson and MacPherson (1991) are also useful points of reference for understanding the way the terms race and ethnicity are contested in Aotearoa / New Zealand.

⁶⁷ As I use the terms "gender-phobic" and "transphobic," they are to transsexuality as "homophobic" is to homosexuality. Bornstein (1995) discusses the need for a word naming the fear and hatred of people who cross over or live between genders. She considers the possibilities of "genderism" and "transphobia" (p.74).

detailed historical information about sexuality and gender remains decades after colonisers' attempts at assimilation and annihilation, it is not simply a case of reclaiming cultural values around gender liminality, but of creating gendered ways of being that satisfy aspects of both racial and (trans)gendered politics.

Transgender Theorising

My focus in this chapter is on the **lack** of attention to race within transgender theorising. To demonstrate this, I could choose any variety of transgender texts and point to the absence of consideration of race. However, as this would be tedious, I have chosen to illustrate my point by drawing on a sample of significant texts which address questions of transgender embodiment, cultural intelligibility of gender, and the politics of surgical trans-sexing. Although Stryker (1994), among other transgender authors, claims the term "transgender" as cross-culturally inclusive, I argue that such inclusivity is not generally reflected in transgender theorising.

Some medical constructions of transsexuality prescribe normative modes of sexual embodiment and collaborate with legal institutions to selectively endorse certain gendered ways of being. Such medical constructions of transsexuality are challenged by transgender writings. Much transgender writing highlights questions of gender relative to questions of racial politics. Some transpeople, however, seek to privilege racial politics. These people may challenge medical approaches to transsexuality on the basis that such approaches represent a violation of cultural values and beliefs about the relationship between sexed embodiment and lived gender. Here, I will draw from three specific transgender texts and pose questions about how considering race may challenge transgender theorising. These questions resonate through the subsequent discussion of the medicalisation of gender liminality among indigenous peoples.

Stryker (1994) outlines two strands of meaning associated with "transgender". The first, which she describes as the original meaning, refers to people who cross genders

without seeking sex reassignment surgery (SRS). The second depicts transgender as a far more diverse and expansive umbrella term “that refers to all identities or practices that cross over, cut across, move between or otherwise queer socially constructed sex/gender boundaries” (p.251, note 2). Stryker claims some cultural diversity for transgender in explaining that it “includes, but is not limited to, transsexuality, heterosexual transvestism, gay drag, butch lesbianism, and such non-European identities as the Native American berdache or the Indian Hijra” (p.251, note 2). In the same chapter, Stryker situates transsexuality as a “culturally and historically specific transgender practice/identity through which a transgendered subject enters into a relationship with medical, psychotherapeutic, and juridical institutions in order to gain access to certain hormonal and surgical technologies for enacting and embodying itself.” (pp.251-252, note 2). As far as this chapter is concerned, my working definition of “transsexual” is similar to Stryker’s, but I question how well “transgender” might operate as the expansive and culturally diverse term Stryker describes. It is significant that Stryker evokes the figure of the “American berdache” in describing the transgender spectrum. Because much transgender writing is emerging within U.S. contexts, the figure of indigenous North American third gender people (or two-spirited people) is often evoked as an example of the potential cultural diversity of “transgender”. Feinberg (1996) also points to African and South American indigenous cultures where two-spirited people have historically been recognised, suggesting that these traditions constitute part of a transgender history that is waiting to be reclaimed.

I am wary of the appropriation of the indigenous gender liminal figure by a predominantly white transgender movement. The indigenous gender liminal figure may appear convenient “proof” for some transgenderists that transgender phenomena are universal and, in some cultural contexts, may be highly esteemed.⁶⁸ This provides a backdrop against which contemporary western contexts may be argued to specifically, systematically and unnecessarily stigmatise transgendered people. In reclaiming gender liminal ways of being that are culturally and/or historically “other”, some

⁶⁸ Besnier (1994) suggests that the valuing of gender liminal individuals in certain cultural contexts may have as much to do with a western fantasy of racialised others as it has to do with the lived realities of those individuals.

contemporary transgenderists universalise and ontologise transgender identities. In terms of articulating transgender politics and forming cohesive groups of people to work together on transgender-rights, this process of reclaiming gender liminal ways of being is important. Arguing for the universal and ontological status of transgender identities is an important political strategy in so far as transgenderists wish to employ identity politics. However, it seems that transgender politics have never simply functioned as "identity politics". Unlike the identity politics of women's, gay, bisexual, or lesbian liberation movements, transgender politics have emerged very much as a 1990's phenomenon and have subsequently been infused with postmodern notions of multiplicity and fluidity; notions which challenge the very foundations of identity (politics). In view of this, the attempts to (re)claim gender liminal racial "others" as "transgendered" become questionable. If transgender theorising is already infused with postmodern challenges to identity (and challenges to the ontology and "knowability" of "gender"), then how is it useful to try and establish a notion of transgender ways of being as universal? And where are the voices of the gender liminal, racial "others" who are implicated in this project? I return to this question after reviewing three transgenderists' attempts to conceptualise the diversity of transgender ways of being.

Sandy Stone's *Posttranssexual Manifesto* presents the possibility of subverting dominant discourses on gender which medical science endorses. Rather than being complicit in the discourses of "the traditional gender frame," Stone argues that it is preferable to "seize upon the textual violence inscribed in the transsexual body and turn it into a reconstructive force" (Stone, 1991, p.295). She proposes that transsexuals who live to pass (and pass to live) be "recruited" from their lives of invisibility where they strive to maintain "plausible histories" to effect the growth of "the genre of visible transsexuals" (p.296). It is the deconstruction of the man/woman binary, and the possibility of identifying visibly as transsexual, that Stone describes as posttranssexuality. For Stone, posttranssexuality provides a means of expanding the bounds of culturally intelligible gender.

Judith Halberstam, in *F2M: The Making of Female Masculinity*, poses a transgendered challenge to the concept of gender, describing gender as a fiction and a postmodern mixing and matching of body parts. In her writing about gender as a

fiction, Halberstam breaks down the notion that there is any "crossing" to be done in moving between/among genders. According to Halberstam, there are a number of ways in which we all - transsexual or otherwise - live this fiction. She writes that "masculinity or femininity *may* be simulated by surgery, but they can also find other fictional forms like clothing or fantasy. Surgery is only one of many possibilities for remaking the gendered body" (Halberstam, 1994, p.225). Halberstam defines her concept of "gender fictions" as "fictions of a body taking its own shape, a cut-up genre that mixes and matches body parts, sexual acts, and postmodern articulations of the impossibility of identity" (1994, p.210).

It is through this notion of gender as a fiction, that Halberstam develops her argument about the concept of "trans," and attempts to break down the barriers which put the "trans" in "transsexual". Reflecting on Stone's *Posttranssexual Manifesto*, Halberstam writes, "[t]he *post* in posttranssexual demands ... that we examine the strangeness of all gendered bodies, not only the transsexualized ones and that we rewrite the cultural fiction that divides a sex from a transsex, a gender from a transgender" (Halberstam, 1994, p.226).

Susan Stryker takes up aspects of Stone's call for transsexual visibility, and Halberstam's claim about the "strangeness of all gendered bodies," in her writing on transgender rage. Through the particularly emotive expression of her transgender rage that takes the form of a 1994 article published in the journal, *GLQ*, Stryker performs a crafty reclaiming of monstrosity - a subversive identification with Frankenstein's monster - writing: "As we rise up from the operating tables of our rebirth, we transsexuals are something more, and something other, than the creatures our makers intended us to be" (p.242). Stryker is specifically concerned with the relationship between the motivations of medical science and transsexual agency, and uses the reclaiming of monstrosity as a means of affirming that it is possible to invest in medical processes of transsexing without being complicit in the maintenance of the gender binary. She also acknowledges the oppressive effects of medical science that "... seeks to contain and colonize the radical threat posed by a particular transgender strategy of resistance to the coerciveness of gender: physical alteration of the genitals" (p.244). Stryker argues that despite the conservative and normalising motivations of medical

science, there is no guarantee of “the compliance of subjects thus embodied with the agenda that resulted in a transsexual means of embodiment” (p.242).

Stryker’s expression of transgender rage, with its specifically corporeal features, comes to a crescendo when she writes:

Rage colors me as it presses in through the pores of my skin, soaking in until it becomes the blood that courses through my beating heart. It is a rage bred by the necessity of existing in external circumstances that work against my survival.

(p.244)

That she is coloured by rage is explicit. How she is coloured by race is not.

“Transgender” Voices?

How might queer and transgender politics and theories work (or not work) for people whose primary political affiliation is with their racial or cultural identity group? In order to explore this question, I draw on interviews with one fa’afafine⁶⁹ and two Maaori transsexuals. Although the interviews were not focused primarily on questions of cultural identity or politics, I did seek interviewees from a diverse range of cultural backgrounds, and some of these interviewees talked about their politics and identities in ways which have prompted and informed the current discussion. In this discussion I draw on interviews with: Don, a 45 year old Samoan fa’afafine; Pat, a 32 year old pre-operative female-to-male (FTM) Maaori man; and Tania, a 36 year old pre-operative male-to-female (MTF) Maaori transsexual. I am not suggesting that these interviewees

⁶⁹ Fa’afafine is the Samoan word, literally meaning “like a woman”, that refers to anatomical males who live outside of the masculine gender role and take on feminine attributes and roles.

are representative. Rather, I examine how their stories and comments trouble questions of cultural identity and “race” within transgender politics.

Don provides an example of reclaiming a traditional sexuality / gender subject position which is very distinct from, but in some respects resembles, transgenderism. He talks about the importance of fa’afafine in Samoan culture, and how his own sense of self-esteem relates to being fa’afafine. To begin with, he describes the relationship between his Samoan and fa’afafine identities by saying that “for me culture is always first and then sexuality,” and, “any interaction I have with anybody, the two things I want them to find out about me is the fact that I’m Samoan first and foremost and ... [secondly] that I’m fa’afafine.” In stating his priorities thus, Don sets himself in sharp relief to queer and transgender stances which often highlight gender and sexuality to the point of obscuring race altogether. Elaborating on this contrast Don describes how, to him, fa’afafine simply “means like a woman,” whereas:

All the Palagi terms: gay, faggot, queer ... [they’re] awful. ... [Those terms] actually tell you how that society views that person. My culture just views it ‘like a woman.’ And it’s like a special woman. It’s a knowledgeable woman but recognised [as] ... anatomically male.⁷⁰

He describes being taught from an early age that to be fa’afafine was to be valued and respected, despite shifting to New Zealand as a child and having to learn that fa’afafine were far less tolerated here.

I was never put down or anything ... I grew up with this really arrogant opinion of myself: for some reason the world is rather special with me in it! Being fa’afafine was really special. Jesus, when I came to New Zealand that was soon cut out! ... I remember my mother saying: ‘You mustn’t walk like that, Don;’ I said: ‘Why not?’ [and she replied:] ‘Well, they don’t do that in New Zealand’. ... That’s something I never ever accepted.

⁷⁰ Palagi is the Samoan word referring to white people.

For Don, cultural identity precedes gender / sexuality identity in political importance, but the two are intrinsically linked; one does not make sense without the other.

Although I wish to foreground Don's understanding of himself as fa'afafine, I must point out that Don is clearly engaging in selective recall in describing "being fa'afafine" as being valued and respected. Living in Samoa presents one with frequent reminders that, in many ways, fa'afafine are not valued or respected.⁷¹ In fact, fa'afafine identity was referred to as unquestionably stigmatising by one of the other interviewees: Babe, who had been brought up in the Cook Islands. Thus, although I continue describing fa'afafine identity through Don's words, I suggest these be interpreted as an act of reclaiming, as an attempt to forge a sense of self-esteem, rather than as an objective description of what or how fa'afafine "is".

Although Don plays an active role in his local gaylesbitrans support networks, he is highly sceptical about the Palagi system of dividing and labelling sexualities and genders, preferring to espouse a more holistic approach. He is also critical of Palagi attempts to reclaim words such as queer, suggesting that this only reflects Palagi cultures' intolerant attitudes towards sexuality and gender variance. Don points out that the division-by-labels of sexuality and gender categories makes it hard to talk about concepts of fa'afafine and holism, for the language assumes categories which obscure the importance of the inclusivity of fa'afafine.

Don pits "Palagi" labelling systems against his own variety of holism, overlooking the obsession with dividing and labelling that also exists within Samoan society.⁷² Although he seeks to reclaim "fa'afafine", Don is critical of palagi attempts to reclaim "queer". This suggests that the language of "queer" (also unpopular with many white gaylesbitrans people) may differentially deter indigenous people for whom "queer" is

⁷¹ My comments about Don's "selective recall" and the relative devaluing of fa'afafine in Samoa do not come from my own experience of, or "knowledge" about, attitudes towards fa'afafine in Samoa but from personal communications with Nico Besnier.

⁷² Pers. Comm. (Besnier, 1997).

merely a reminder of the erotophobia of anglophonic colonisers. Furthermore, Don's point about the difficulty of talking about concepts of fa'afafine through English language is consistent with my own difficulty in finding words to talk about the Maori, Samoan and Cook Island Maori interviewees involved in this study. (Hence, my reluctant reliance on the term "gender liminal".)

For Don, being fa'afafine does not imply dissatisfaction with sexed embodiment nor does it make specifications about partner-gender; fa'afafine is constructed across sexuality and gender. However, he echoes his elders in expressing concern about younger fa'afafine being attracted by the glamour and lifestyle of cities where they come to think of themselves more in terms of western transvestite and transsexual identities, rather than according to traditional understandings of fa'afafine. Some of these young fa'afafine opt for SRS. Don hastens to add that he is not opposed to SRS on principle; he has some older fa'afafine friends who have waited years, ensuring that they are making the right decision, before going ahead with surgery. Nevertheless, he is concerned about the general westernisation and subsequent degradation of fa'afafine identities, saying "I know of some of the traditional fa'afafines [sic] and each time I've gone back to Samoa it's always been the case 'Oh gosh, we're being reduced to a ... cock in a frock.'"

Don's willingness to accept that some of his fa'afafine friends seek SRS, accompanied by his concern for younger fa'afafine who are completely seduced by Palagi understandings of sexuality and gender, remind me of Besnier's comment: "Further discussion of gender liminality in Polynesia cannot take place without locating the category in a specific historical context and must address its relationship to modernization and change" (1994, p.328). To this I add that discussion of transgenderism would benefit from further consideration of the effects of westernisation on gender liminality, not for the sake of a simplistic reclaiming of a "third gender"⁷³ status, but for the sake of contextualising transgender theorising with respect to cross-cultural understandings of gender as those understandings change over time.

⁷³ Besnier (1994) critiques the notion of fa'afafine as a third gender (pp.320, 326-327).

Some aspects of Don's reclaiming fa'afafine as a highly esteemed way of being and challenging Palagi approaches to sexuality and gender seem to work along similar lines to queer and transgendered critiques of psycho-medical discourses on transsexuality. He describes fa'afafine as inclusive and expansive in a way that is reminiscent of some authors' descriptions of queer (Danuta-Walters, 1996; Goldman, 1996). He describes fa'afafine as encompassing gender-crossing possibilities similar to those discussed by some transgender authors (eg: Stryker, 1994). Given that there are these parallels between Don's discourse on fa'afafine ways of being and some queer and transgender discourses, how might they inform one another more fruitfully? How might queer be theorised to better take into account Don's perspective of putting culture first and gender / sexuality second? Must there be such a prioritizing for issues of racism, homophobia and transphobia to be effectively combated?

Perhaps fa'afafine identities provide an example of a crossing that can be sanctioned (for Don, if not for all fa'afafine) because family ties and the knowledge of cultural history are still sufficiently intact. This is different in cultural contexts where such historical ties have been lost. As Besnier points out, with the possible exceptions of New Zealand and Hawai'i,

Polynesian societies were generally not subjected to systematic annihilating efforts on the part of colonizing populations ... [so w]hile North American berdache traditions died out with the contexts that supported them, the cultural setting in which Polynesian gender liminality is embedded never disappeared.

(1994, p.559, note 36)

Therefore, how might Don's perspectives on gender liminality differ from those of people for whom such historical, cultural connections have been largely lost? What recourse do these people have for reclaiming culturally-specific understandings of gender crossing?

Some Maaori transpeople are attempting to map discursive pathways for the purpose of reclaiming both cultural and queer/trans identities. They juggle Maaori and transgendered identities in their attempts to hold specific forms of racialised gender liminality in high esteem. Issues of specific concern are: the lack (or inaccessibility) of knowledges about pre-colonial concepts of gender and sexuality; the relative facility of accessing western psycho-medical discourses as ways of understanding experiences of gender liminality; the possible contradictions between medical and Maaori discourses on (transsexual) bodies; and the current power differential between Maaori and Pakeha which enables New Zealand laws (and therefore transsexuals' legal rights) to be dictated primarily by Pakeha (medical) understandings of sexed embodiment.⁷⁴

Tania provides an example of some of the dilemmas faced by Maaori gender liminal people. Whilst she is aware of queer and transgender critiques of compartmentalising of gender and sexuality, and she has developed her own criticisms of the medicalisation of transsexuality, she finds it convenient to use the idea of a "transsexual" identity as somewhere to "belong." Like Stryker's monster, Tania is choosing to go through with medical procedures, while being critical of contemporary western conceptions of the body / psyche relationship upon which medicalised perspectives on transsexuality are based. On principle, she disagrees with the suggestion that she must have SRS to attain the legal rights of a woman, arguing that this reduces "woman" to a vagina. In practice, she has decided to opt for SRS, a decision which she describes as a strategic means of accessing civil rights.⁷⁵ Tania finds it useful to think of SRS as a goal: something tangible to aim for.

⁷⁴ Because legislation in this area takes its lead from current medical "knowledge", gender liminal people are unlikely to be accorded the legal rights of the "other sex" unless they have undergone hormonal and surgical "sex reassignment". Thus, western medical understandings of "transsexuality" effectively dictate the legal identities of gender liminal people regardless of specific racial or cultural meanings attached to such liminality.

⁷⁵ According to current law in Aotearoa / New Zealand, without SRS Tania would be ineligible for a passport or other such legal documentation identifying her as female; were she sentenced to prison she would be sent to a men's prison; and were she dismissed from her place of employment on the grounds of her (trans)gender identity there would be little legal precedent

As gender liminal people negotiate the interaction between their cultural identities and how they live as wo/men, self esteem inevitably plays a part. Both Tania's and Don's efforts to value their gender liminal ways of being point to the importance of self esteem, of being able to make informed decisions (about how to label and whether to seek SRS), and of having a place to "belong". Reclaiming cultural identity is one way in which such a sense of belonging and self esteem may be attained. As suggested by Tania's interview, claiming cultural identity may also provide a foundation upon which to build a critique of the ontologising and pathologising of transsexuality.

Tania describes herself as moving in predominantly Maaori circles, and talks about Maaori women in general, and a Maaori (non-operative) MTF transgendered friend in particular, serving as role models in her development of her self as a woman. According to Tania, her transgendered friend appears to have been accepted by local Maaori in so far as she has authority as a woman during traditional gender-specific cultural rituals and practices. Tania talks about this person as very vocal and assertive in demanding acceptance as a woman within traditional Maaori contexts. Perhaps following her friend's lead, Tania has developed various arguments herself which validate her transsexuality and depend upon the assertion of her identity as Maaori. To explain this, she draws on the Maaori conception of identity as something which is never based in the individual alone but relates to the extended family (whaanau) and to genealogy (whakapapa). She argues that to deride her for being transsexual would be to denigrate her entire ancestral line: a far more risky and grave action than merely discriminating against an "individual."

Theorising transgender and queer more specifically to address race, indigeneity, and colonisation might provide more discursive pathways for indigenous people struggling to live in gender liminal ways. For this purpose, it is vital to rework trans/queer theorising so that it is more relevant and open to people for whom gender / sexuality

and no definitive legislative ground upon which she could claim unfair dismissal. This may be contrasted with discrimination on the grounds of sexual identity which is explicitly prohibited by the Human Rights Act (1993).

identities come second to racial identities, and to work such theorising so that it is open to cross-cultural interpretations of the relationship between sexed embodiment and lived gender. Such reworking would be different from a simplistic (re)claiming of racialised others as “transgendered”. By this means, the important work being done by transgenderists and queers who challenge medical definitions of sexualities and genders may be accessible to a more racially diverse range of people who might otherwise find no recourse but to invest in medical discourses on transsexuality.

The other interviewee who talked about seeking ways to validate his Maaori identity and make sense of his gender liminal experiences is Pat. Unlike Tania, Pat invests strongly and relatively uncritically in medical discourses on transsexuality. He is concerned with “paving the way” for others who try to access FTM surgery as well as wanting to pass in every possible way as a heterosexual man. Whilst thinking of himself as a heterosexual man and wishing to masculinize his body as much as possible, Pat does not maintain at all costs the “plausible history” described by Stone. He is willing to be publicly visible as trans in order to change people’s attitudes, but wishes that he had simply been born “in the right body” to start with. He repeated time and again how dissatisfied he is with his body, describing the enormous efforts he and his partner have made to access the medical services he wants. Both Pat and his partner explained their intense scepticism about the skills and attitudes of medical professionals in response to transsexuals, and said that it was important for them both to do as much research as they could to make sure that he was getting the best treatment possible.

The transgender rage which motivates Stryker to subvert medical discourses is analogous to the energy Pat has directed towards taking as much control over the medical process as possible. This involves ensuring that he progresses as speedily and safely as possible towards the envisaged “male” body. Having been on hormones for some time, Pat is concerned about the effects of having hormones without surgery, suggesting that “getting testosterone pumped into your body every three weeks” but “missing the main part ... [i.e., the genitalia, that] I should have been born with in the first place” is only adding to his sense of not being fulfilled. For Pat, there is no room for ambiguity and therefore, medical discourses suit his purposes well: if only the

surgery he wants becomes available to him. After growing up in a family where there was little chance of developing pride in his cultural heritage, Pat has found a niche where both his Maaori and his transgender identities can be respected and valued, though he sees himself ultimately moving toward simply being a “heterosexual man.”

Pat talks enthusiastically about the meeting of his trans and Maaori identities in the kapa haka (cultural performance) group to which he belongs. When he and his partner initially joined this group they were received unquestioningly as a heterosexual couple by the other group members, many of whom were gay men and women and “queens.” As Pat describes it, he eventually became tired of the queens always taking centre-stage and decided to “out” himself as trans. In his words: “everybody loves the queens ... and here I am amongst all these queens and [eventually, I say] ‘OK, OK, you’re queens, I’m King!’.” Upon realising that Pat, too, was trans, one of the queens who is skilled in Maaori tattoo art designed some tattoos to be drawn over his mastectomy scars for performances during which he and the other men are topless.

In Pat’s talk about his life, there is a tension between the simultaneous honouring of his Maaori and trans identities, and his striving towards simply being a heterosexual man (which he perceives to be achievable only through medical means). The only time Pat talked about transgender identity as something to be held in high esteem was when he talked about it in conjunction with his Maaori identity in the context of the kapa haka group. However, he spent a great deal of the interview talking about his frustration with medical professionals, his disappointment about the inaccessibility of the surgery he would like to have, and his desire to pass in all aspects of life as a heterosexual man. Unlike Halberstam, Pat neither embraces the idea of gender as a fiction nor wishes to live with his current mixing and matching of body parts. Unlike Stryker’s monster, Pat does not imagine himself rising from an operating table having found a way to be other than a medically constructed transsexual, or a conservatively defined heterosexual male.

How can Pat’s sense of dissatisfaction with his body and frustration with medical processes be contrasted with Tania’s critical negotiation of medical discourses and Don’s complete distancing from western understandings of the relationship between

sexed anatomy and lived gender? Can queer and trans academics and activists address race in their theorising without making simplistic assumptions about indigenous cultures who can call on “third gender” traditions? Can queer/trans theorising become useful to indigenous people who seek culturally appropriate alternatives to medical discourses on transsexuality? What other discursive means might Maaori gender liminal people employ to challenge the corporeal colonisation that is transsexuality? I pose these questions, not as an act of avoidance or a mere display of rhetoric, but with the suggestion that they could form the base for further research. Just as feminists, and particularly women of colour, have begun theorising the relationship between race and gender in so far as it relates to the workings of racism and sexism, so do researchers writing about transsexuality need to articulate the interactions of racial and transgender ways of being more thoroughly. Such research could contribute particularly to negotiations of legal changes relating to “gender identity” and transgender rights. Also, it may further unsettle psycho-medical attempts to define, or diagnose (and therefore ontologise) transsexuality.

Conclusion

I am concerned about the racialised aspects of medico-legal ontologising of transsexuality, and about unacknowledged racial bias operating within dominant understandings of the relationship between lived gender and sexual anatomy. For transgendered people generally, and specifically for some transpeople of indigenous cultures, such biases are problematic. I suggest that for transgender theorising to effectively and thoroughly challenge psycho-medical discourses on transsexuality, there needs to be more consideration of the racial bias inherent in those discourses. In order to present such a challenge, transgender theorising would need to examine its own racial biases.

Transgender theorising may “look” different if transgender writings are reviewed through lenses that disallow the obscuring of racial identity by the passionate outpourings of transgender rage. If we think of colonisation as a process of rendering

racialised bodies monstrous, how might we approach differently the reclaiming of transsexual bodies as monstrous? How might the postmodern strategy of mixing and matching of body parts be differentially available with regard to racialised bodies? How might investing in aspects of current transgender discourse amount to complicity with the colonising culture of which medical discourses are only a small part? How can transgender theorising be critical of its own racialised politics in a way that is productive for those who place race first and gender second? Perhaps Pat, performing topless in the kapa haka group - mastectomy scars overlaid with Maaori tattoo art - provides an illustration of how transgender and racial politics do not need to be approached in an either / or fashion, but can be worked together.

The questions I raise in relation to the living and theorising of gender liminality in a post-colonial context are inspired by, but not limited to, the concerns of gender liminal indigenous persons. Indeed, most of these issues are felt across transpeople of many racial identities, such as the on-going battles surrounding legal rights of transpeople, issues about accessibility and cost of medical procedures, and questions around the position of transsexuality within psycho-medical discourses. What I have chosen to highlight, however, is how these issues might require different subversive strategies, and different theoretical workings, according to the racial positioning of the transpeople concerned. My purpose in doing this is to critique the way perspectives of whiteness⁷⁶ echo, largely unacknowledged, through transgender (and queer) theorising and to thus inspire more critical thinking about the racialised aspects of transgender bodies and gender liminal ways of being.

⁷⁶For an inspiring model of writing whiteness overtly into texts, so that it is articulated as a racialised position rather than being normalised, see Frankenberg (1996).

PART FIVE: QUEER / TRANS CONNECTIONS

Contemporary poststructuralist critiques of (gay/lesbian) identity politics currently informs transgender theorising. I begin by identifying how “queer” and “transgender” theorising and politics could conceivably overlap.

- ⇒ “Queer”, as a term, is sometimes used in such a way as to include transsexual, transvestite and transgender ways of being and politics.
- ⇒ “Queer Theory”⁷⁷ claims both sexuality and gender as its fields of study, and (like critical transgender theorising) shows particular interest in non-normativity and transgression.
- ⇒ Queer and transgender theorising both employ critiques of modernist, behaviourist psycho-medical definitions of sexuality and gender identities.
- ⇒ Queer theorising, like transgender analyses, seeks to destabilise categories which are seen as the basis for oppressive power operations; e.g., man/woman, hetero/homo.

⁷⁷I begin by highlighting ways in which queer theorising may be useful to transgender theoretical and political endeavours, while simultaneously problematising the way that “Queer Theory” has come to be promulgated. I use scare quotes to signal my concern, which is echoed in Berlant and Warner’s article on “Queer Theory”.

We have been invited to pin the queer theory tail on the donkey. But here we ... stand half amazed at this poor donkey’s present condition. Queer theory has already incited a vast labor of metacommentary Yet the term itself is less than five years old.... In our view, it is not useful to consider queer theory a thing, especially one dignified by capital letters. We wonder whether queer commentary might not more accurately describe the things linked by the rubric, most of which are not theory.

(1995, p.343)

- ⇒ Both transgender and queer politics privilege visibility, outness, and radical in-your-face activism.
- ⇒ Queer theories display an interest in bodies, especially in so far as they support the transgressive and anti-normalising politics of queer (and therefore transgenderism).
- ⇒ Queer and transgender critical theorising are situated within very similar intellectual, historical, geographical and political contexts and are necessarily informed by one another.

For these reasons, it may make sense to explore the ways in which “Queer Theory” provides an answer to the transgender concerns raised already in this thesis. “Queer Theory” may provide a framework for critiquing the medical construction and pathologising of transsexuality. “Queer Theory” may offer ways to conceptualise the relationship between homosexuality and transsexuality, without relegating any combination of sexual desires and gendered ways of being to a category of deviance, or a “minority group” too small to be worth considering. “Queer Theory” may provide the conceptual tools for theorising the various configurations of trans-sexed embodiment. Queer, as an articulation of postmodern uncertainty - apparently deconstructing the very ground upon which it stands - may open alternative pathways to understanding “gender uncertainty” and critiquing imperatives towards (normative) “gender certainty”. Queer challenges to gay/lesbian politics may be informative for those who practice transsexual/transgender identity politics. Furthermore, queer theorising certainly challenges the ontologising of “man”, “woman”, and “transsexual”.

To discuss all of these possibilities for the applicability of queer theorising to transgenderism would constitute a thesis in itself. According to some articulations of queer (where “queer” is understood to encompass lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual and transgender concerns), “Queer Theory” implicitly deals with transgender issues. However, through reading queer literatures - whether popular or academic - one quickly notices that in many cases “queer” mysteriously comes to mean “gay/lesbian”.⁷⁸ Thus, trans/gender issues are frequently surreptitiously dropped from

⁷⁸ Jagose (1996) is a recent example of such a text, published in New Zealand. This book, simply titled *Queer Theory*, is written with an undergraduate audience in mind, and presents

queer agendas. In queer communities too, gender issues often become marginalised (a point which has certainly not escaped the attention of some feminist critics of queer, e.g., Zita, 1994; Danuta-Walters, 1996). Gender issues become marginalised unless, that is, those “gender” issues can be used for the benefit of the group as whole (i.e., for the benefit of the more vocal proponents of queer). For example, (trans)gendered ways of being become focal points for queer for the purpose of entertainment (drag queens); for the purpose of theorising gay/lesbian non-normative gender expressions (butch/femme); for the purpose of exalting transgression: transgression as trendy, as in-your-face, as a politically visible statement. At these points, transgenderism often gets wheeled out and set up as the vanguard, the epitome, of queer statements of transgression. Therefore, rather than discussing in detail how queer theorising could inform discussion of transgender issues in previous chapters, I will present a broader discussion of what is at stake, what would need to change, and what could be gained, through trying to work queer and transgender theorising together. In this context, working bodies of theory together, means being sensitive to the dialectical interactions between them, and it means bringing the complexities of transgender experience to queer theorising.

In what ways do queer analyses overlook transsexual and transgender experience? In order to answer this question, in Chapter Ten, I discuss queer theorising and politics. I highlight ways in which the notion of “queer” may be useful for developing critical understandings of transsexuality, and I identify ways in which queer theorising is problematic.

What are the risks, politically and theoretically, of endorsing a notion of “queer” that marginalises transsexual and transgender concerns? By working with an understanding of “queer ethics”, in Chapter Eleven, I discuss the relationship between queer and transgender theoretical agendas. I conclude by presenting “outlaw theorising” (O’Driscoll, 1996) as a means of circumventing problems encountered by queer and transgender theorising.

CHAPTER TEN: QUEER THEORISING

Queer theory represents/is the space of the other ... Queer theory speaks about itself from within. Unlike the master discourses of the West, it does not position its subject as 'other'; it is the other. Queer theory situates otherness - a range of identities - as more important than the notion of a singular identity...

In his analysis of postmodernism, Lyotard calls for the abandonment of all Truths and the provisional adoption of short narratives which the dominant discourses have attempted to silence. Queer theory seeks to open up a space in which these narratives, these spaces of the other, can speak. It also seeks to demonstrate the inter-relatedness of all positions. ... But, because the kinds of desire being spoken are viewed by many as unknown, terrifying and monstrous, queer theory's project may prove an extremely difficult one. ... Confronting the 'otherness' within oneself is a formidable task.

(Creed, 1994, p.159)

Queer has been variously conceptualised, first relative to lesbian and gay, and later relative to bisexual and transgender identities, politics, and theorising (Tierney, 1997). For instance, De Lauretis (1991) writes about how queer stands at a critical distance from lesbian and gay, while Doty (1993) describes queer as encompassing a range of "nonstraight positions" including lesbian, gay, and bisexual. Some authors choose to use lesbian and gay in place of queer, because lesbian and gay are more widely accepted (Abelove, Barale, and Halperin, 1993), while others reject queer because of its perceived exclusivity with regard to class and race (Miguel Gutierrez, quoted in Cosson, 1991, p.16).

Queer theory marks a shift from identity-centred politics to politics that recognise diversity and difference. It draws principally on works of Foucault, postmodernism,

and the Lacanian psychoanalytic revolution. According to O'Driscoll, queer theory variously critiques (sexuality) identity categories, builds on gay / lesbian (and I would add bisexual) theorising and politics, develops a "Foucauldian investigation of sexual categories" (1996, p.31), provides a form of resistance to normalising regimes, and challenges notions of naturalness.

Between Tierney and Doty, I think we may reach an understanding of the linguistic and political significance of queer, which is useful here. Tierney (1997) reminds us that the "point of saying, 'We're queer,' is that it highlights difference in an effort to expose norms" (p.29), while Doty (1993) asserts that "[q]ueerness should challenge and confuse our understanding and uses of sexual and gender categories" (p.xvii). These approaches to queer appeal to me because they foreground queer's subversive agendas, reveal the awareness of power relations offered by queer analyses, and acknowledge the intertwining of sexuality and gender. These statements about queer are useful because they do not fall back on lesbigaytrans identity labels for the purpose of "defining" queer, thus leaving queer open to serve its analytic and political functions without being straitjacketed within a "definition".

In writing about queer, it is important to acknowledge the interrelationship between queer identities and queer theorising. Some confusion may result from describing bodies of theoretical work under the same labels that people use to identify themselves. This relates to "transgender" as much as it relates to "queer". For this reason, in chapter eleven, I discuss O'Driscoll's (1996) "outlaw theorising" as a possible way of engaging in the subversive theorising attempted under the terms of queer and transgender, without confusing identity labels with theorising. In this chapter, however, I will discuss variously queer theorising, politics, and identities.

One way in which queer is theorised is through people who reclaim the term queer in order to describe their own political positions with regard to sexuality, gender, and identity. Wilson, participating in queer internet discussions, engages in this very kind of theorising: theorising which stems from her own identification as queer. Wilson describes her own interpellation as queer by positioning queer relative to essentialist understandings of self. She defends herself against the accusation that identifying as

queer merely avoids the issue of identity. I quote the following excerpt in full because it resonates with aspects of the way “transgender” is used as a gender identification that challenges gender identification.⁷⁹ Wilson writes:

The first movement toward queer is understanding the absurdity of the process of categorization, even as that process has eclipsed the old one of blissfully sinking into the cocoon of the essential self. I categorize not to organize but to underscore my constant acts ... of eliding the borders I still perceive emotionally even as I intellectually understand them to be figments of our imaginations. ‘But what are you?’ I can hear them asking me in tones echoing hostility, or exasperation, or mistrust ...

I am queer.

This assertion is not a dodge designed to avoid being definitively placed in the world. My place in the world is queer ... This is a posture of endless adjustment and re-adjustment - not to others’ demands that my position constantly reassure them in regard to theirs - but adjustment to the inevitability of my own displacement.

How Wilson understands herself as queer is reminiscent of various interviewees’ comments about identifying as wo/man or transgendered (or, in Kal’s case, as an “androgyn”). Wilson’s “posture of endless adjustment” reminds me of Tania’s talk about learning from women how to do femininity and then deciding that she would just do it her way anyway, leaving others to fit in around her. For Tania, being “a woman” is as much a fluid, subversive and conscious process as being “queer” is for Wilson. Tania knows that she can never fully inhabit “woman”, but is happy to deploy the term to her own ends. Kal uses a similar strategy with a different term. For Kal, “androgyn” signals the possibility of being simultaneously “both and neither”. S/he experiences persistent and prying questions from frustrated others who wish to fit her/him neatly into one category or the other, but s/he uses the term “androgyn” as a refusal to “fit”.

⁷⁹This excerpt is from an article titled *(Dis)ordered Selves: Dangerous Transactions*, published in the electronic journal “queer-e”.

S/he is not “dodging being placed in the world”, but s/he does dodge being categorised according to hegemonic assumptions about sexuality and gender.

If queer is deployed as Wilson suggests, it may allow one to simultaneously identify with a position whilst challenging the very notion of identification, and unsettling any “positioning” within the terms of “gender” and “sexuality”. But how effective is queer in this project of destabilising norms? And can it work for gender as it supposedly does for sexuality?

Clearly, my main concern here is how well queer facilitates transgender goals. The question of how well queer addresses gender is also discussed by feminists, some of whom feel that queer risks marginalising gender issues. For instance, Danuta-Walters (1996) presents a witty attack on queer, suggesting that although queer purportedly theorises beyond gender, because of the way it is often couched in postmodern rhetoric, the material effects of gender are not challenged at all. She is critical of queer’s failure to take lesbian feminist “gender” politics seriously, humorously describing the way lesbian feminism and queer theorising talk past one another. Speaking ironically from a “queer” perspective, Danuta-Walters tells the following story:

[O]nce upon a time there was this group of really boring ugly women who never had sex, walked a lot in the woods, read bad poetry about goddesses, wore flannel shirts, and hated men (even their gay brothers). They called themselves lesbians. Then, thankfully, along came these guys named Foucault, Derrida, and Lacan dressed in girls’ clothes riding some very large white horses. They told these silly women that they were politically correct, rigid, frigid, sex-hating prudes who just did not GET IT - it was all a game anyway, all about words and images, all about mimicry and imitation, all a cacophony of signs leading back to nowhere. To have a politics around gender was silly, they were told, because gender was just a performance anyway, a costume one put on and, in drag performance, wore backward. And everyone knew boys were better at dress up.

So queerness is theorized as somehow beyond gender, a vision of a sort of transcendent polymorphous perversity deconstructing as it slips from one desiring/desired object to the other. But this forgets the very real and felt experience of gender that women, particularly, live with quite explicitly.

(Danuta-Walters, 1996, p.844)

Here, Danuta-Walters evokes an image of lesbians (and women more generally) who are clearly not served well by the politics of queer. I suggest this critique could equally relate to those transsexual and transgender people to whom the academic, postmodern rhetoric of queer is inaccessible, and for whom the material effects of living “beyond gender” may have devastating results. For example, Feinberg (1996) writes about one particularly politically visible “transgender warrior”, Martha “P.” Johnson⁸⁰, suggesting that she may have been murdered soon after a Pride March, and Butler (1993) writes about Venus Extravaganza who was murdered “presumably by a client who, upon the discovery of what she calls her ‘little secret,’ mutilates her for having seduced him” (p.130).

⁸⁰ More specifically, Feinberg writes,

Marsha ‘P.’ Johnson fought back against the police during the Stonewall Rebellion. The ‘P’ stood for ‘Pay it no mind!’ ... [Marsha] was a source of strength and pride to me and many, many others in the drag, transgender, and lesbian and gay communities. Marsha was found floating in the Hudson River near the piers in New York City shortly after the 1992 Pride March. The police ‘investigation’ reportedly consisted of two phone calls, and they ruled her death a suicide. A people’s poster campaign dug up reports that Marsha had been harassed near the piers earlier that evening

(Feinberg, 1996, p.131).

According to this report, the “devastating results” of living “beyond gender” even reach beyond death to the likelihood that the murder of transgendered people may be overlooked by authorities unwilling to challenge their own or others’ transphobia.

I suggest that in some respects queer theorising offers useful insights for transgender theorising, whilst in other respects the way “queer” operates (within theorising and within communities) further marginalises transpeople.

Where is the “trans” in “queer”?

[I]n its very origins and its early attempts at self-definition, transgender studies is allied with queer.

(Prosser, 1998, p.60)

[I]f queer theory seeks to question the notion of a unified, discrete homosexual identity, it must take into account all of the forms of desire that exist, not simply those that have found acceptability within the lesbian and gay male communities.

(Creed, 1994, p.157)

Tierney (1997) writes that whereas “only a handful of years ago, queer meant lesbian and gay, in the late 1990s queer now also includes bisexuals and transgendered people” (p.28). Although queer is purported to “include” transgendered people, it does not always do so in ways that transgendered people might wish. Here I present one of the most prolific writers of “queer theory”, and consider how her work addresses transsexuality.

Judith Butler theorises queer without pretending queer is simply a 1990’s substitution for gay/lesbian. Butler is interested in the queering of both sexualities and genders, as well as the politics of deploying such a term as queer. She argues that gender and sexuality are each regulated via the shaming of the other, and describes how heterosexism operates in the maintenance of normative assumptions about gendering (as I have in Chapter Five). Butler is emphatic that queer relates to the theorising of sexuality **and** gender. She argues that “some people in queer theory want to claim that the analysis of sexuality can be radically separated from the analysis of gender, I’m

very much opposed to them” (Butler, 1994, p.32). In this respect, Butler’s approach to queer theorising would seem to implicate transsexual and transgender identities as much as lesbian identities.

Butler’s analysis of queer holds much potential for transgender theorising. For instance, in her chapter titled *Critically Queer* (1993), she describes how the subject is not a fixed site at which various identities merge, but instead the subject is constituted by the constant interarticulation of identities. Thus, it is a mistake to use identity descriptors as absolute. This approach to theorising subjectivity is useful for transgender theorists who wish to argue that they are never simply “men” or “women”, for to identify with one or other of those terms would be to imply that their subject positions are fixed sites which can be absolutely described using identity descriptors.

Butler (1993) describes how “queer” originally created and shamed the queer subject and how the force of queer as ridicule and as a positive political statement comes from its repeated use. She argues that through queer people using the term queer across time and space, a certain kind of subject with a certain kind of history is created. This process is surely paralleled by the reclaiming of terms such as “transgender” and “transsexual”⁸¹ for the purpose of maintaining visibility of gender non-normativity, establishing community, and developing a base for politics.

As Butler (1993) observes about “queer”, so too does Bornstein (1995) observe about the term “transgender”, that it may bring certain people together but it will never adequately describe those people therefore it must always be open to taking on new meanings. Butler claims that this openness to reinterpretation is not only a strength in terms of making queer available to new generations of queers, but also in terms of exposing and reworking the historicity of queer. By inserting “transgender” into Butler’s observations, I suggest we may see how transgender theorising and politics

⁸¹ “Transsexual” (with one “s”) is sometimes used by transpeople who wish to articulate the critical distance between their trans identification and the medical category “transsexual” (Valentine and Wilchins, 1997).

are informed or could be informed by the workings of queer. Butler suggests that for queer politics to continue to be useful to queer people, the term queer must necessarily be constantly shifting to accommodate the various and ever-changing ways in which queers are constituted. She argues that queer can never be owned but can only be twisted, redeployed and ultimately given up for another term or strategy. According to this perspective, deconstructing queer should not prevent us from using the term, but should instead lead us to investigate the risky implications of the term. It is this kind of investigation that I have been taking up: deconstructing the terms “transsexual” and “transgender” that they might be more carefully worked, and their politics more thoroughly articulated.

Importantly for writings which blur the relationship between queer / trans identifications and queer / trans theorising, Butler reminds us about the perils of self-naming. She questions the presentist assumption that one arrives in the world without a history and “makes oneself ... through the magic of the name” (Butler, 1993, p.228), arguing that self-naming and expecting to be able to entirely reclaim that name from its historical origins is part of a dream about choice which ignores the way power operates through discourse. Therefore, if transgender theorising is to take on board the theoretical analysis offered by queer, “transgender” must not simply be conceptualised as a third gender, or as an identity that somehow steps outside of gender. The term transgender, like queer, cannot disrupt gender if it is used without critical awareness of its own history (or the history of the term transsexual) nor if it is used simply as an identity category.

Butler draws on Althusserian understandings of subjectivity to describe how the subject is interpellated into categories through repetitive naming.⁸² This naming not

⁸² Briefly, Althusser (1971, pp.162-163) describes interpellation as a process of becoming a particular kind of subject by being hailed or recruited. He writes,

[I]deology ‘acts’ or ‘functions’ in such a way that it ‘recruits’ subjects among the individuals (it recruits them all), or ‘transforms’ the individuals into subjects (it transforms them all) by that very precise operation which I have called interpellation or hailing, and which can be imagined along the lines of the most commonplace everyday police (or other) hailing: ‘Hey, you there!’

only tells us what we “are”, but sets the bounds of what it is possible to “be”. Thus, the requirement that a transsexual person be diagnosed by a psychiatrist as having “Gender Identity Disorder” cannot be read as an innocent attempt to protect SRS candidates from making the wrong decision. And the transsexual who seeks the psychiatric diagnosis necessary for surgical approval cannot completely ignore the effects of being thus “interpellated” into a diagnostic category. Despite the political intentions of that person, and despite how subversively they live within their transsexed body post-operatively, at some point, the bounds of what they can “be” is necessarily constrained by how they are constituted through psycho-medical discourses.

If “interpellation” refers to a process whereby the subject is “recruited” as, for instance, “transsexual”, then the process of diagnosis plays an important role in that interpellation. For many transsexuals (such as Sarah, quoted below) the appointment with the psychiatrist is understood as a means of making official their transsexual status. This is not understood in terms of the psycho-medical diagnostic category “Gender Identity Disorder”. On the contrary, as Sarah (and Myra) describe, the psycho-medical process is understood as a way of *removing* the stigma of mental illness by declaring the transsexual client to be “sane”. That is, the psychiatrist is understood by some transpeople to affirm one’s transsexual status by declaring that one identifies as a woman (in Sarah’s case) because one is transsexual, rather than because one is psychotic. Transsexuals are often interpellated into the category “transsexual” long before visiting a psychiatrist. As part of the attempt to access SRS, many transsexuals visit psychiatrists, some understanding this process as an innocent (though tiresome) part of being interpellated into the category “transsexual”.

By the time Sarah began visiting psychiatrists, she had already sought much information about transsexuality, she confidently described herself as transsexual, and felt absolutely certain that SRS would be the best thing for her. During the workshop, she recalled:

I went along with the visits to psychiatrists ... and in retrospect I see that as tremendously degrading that I had to go to three psychiatrists and get

their approval for me to do something that I'd gone through an awful lot of work, a lot of reading, I'd found out an awful lot about transsexuality about surgery and I knew that that was right for me, and yet I had to go and get three psychiatrists to declare me sane!

...

Each of those visits was quite painless but I found it demeaning that I had to go and explain what I was and why I wanted what I did to three psychiatrists.

This provides an example of how the psychiatric process can appear quite innocent yet be experienced otherwise. Perhaps Sarah's experience of the clinical process as "degrading" and "demeaning" tells us more about the disjuncture between diagnosis and interpellation than it tells us about Sarah's interactions with the psychiatrists themselves. After all, she admits that "each of those visits was quite painless", and that she was offered support by the psychiatrists. From her sense of discomfort, we may infer that Sarah was not entirely happy about the psychiatric process, nor did she fully understand the implications of it. The visits themselves appear to have been presented to Sarah as innocent; as aspects of medical procedure without political implications. When I spoke to her some years after her surgery, I discovered that she was still unaware that what she had been through was a diagnostic process. Therefore, Sarah's memory of visiting three psychiatrists was that those psychiatrists "declared her sane" and affirmed her sense of herself as transsexual, not that they diagnosed her as gender dysphoric. For Sarah, diagnosis was part of the process of being interpellated as "transsexual".

As naming set the bounds of what we are, according to Butler, it also designates what is "human". She writes that we can "see this most clearly in the example of those abjected beings who do not appear properly gendered; it is their very humanness that comes into question" (1993, p.8). Here, Butler could be read as foreshadowing the kind of reclaiming she later describes: the queer reclaiming of the abject. Alternatively, the above quotation could be the first warning signal that Butler is not about to take transgender politics seriously; that the possibility of stepping outside gender norms could ultimately go beyond the reclaiming potential of queer. Or perhaps the reference

to abject genders provides an extreme example for queer; thus positioning transgenderism as outside, or on the very margins of queer. Here lies a risk of theorising transsexuality in queer academic contexts: that transgender examples may become merely intellectual stimulus for queer theorists, a point I revisit (via Namaste's critique of Butler) in Chapter Eleven.

Butler suggests we may understand the resignifying powers of queer through the concept of performativity. Performativity is "that aspect of discourse that has the capacity to produce what it names" (Butler, 1994, p.33). The performative is a repeated series of actions through which societal norms and ways of being are established and maintained. Thus, performative speech acts "bring into being that which they name" (Butler, 1994, p.33). For instance, through queer activism, hegemonic sexuality and gender relations are rehearsed with a queer twist being added to each rehearsal. The queering of straight practices highlights the fragility of hegemonic sexualities and genders and opens the way for non-normative ways of being to be reclaimed. Examples of performatives include statements through which we are defined legally as male or female, such as: "It's a girl!" and the subsequent registering of the infant's sex on her birth certificate.

During the workshop, Kal described a plan s/he had for future political activism, which involved walking topless through the centre of town. Kal, who has not had SRS, still has identification papers declaring him/her as legally male; therefore s/he presumes that lawfully s/he is allowed to be topless in public places. However, s/he constructs walking topless through town as politically subversive because s/he very obviously has breasts and would without doubt be (mis)taken for a woman and possibly arrested. Here, a familiar performance of maleness (appearing topless in public), when queered, constitutes a subversive political display, thus forcing the boundaries of man and woman to be questioned, as well as challenging the legal implications of condoning toplessness for some bodies but not others.

Some strands of transgender activism assume that exposing the "untruth" of the gender binary, by making visible multiple gender-possibilities, will weaken hegemonic pressures to "be" either / or. In contrast, queer subversions are not just about a

proliferation of genders, but operate through the resignification of norms. Queer performativity is about “*working the weakness of the norm* [and] ... inhabiting the practices of its rearticulation” (Butler, 1993, p.237). Butler has attempted to use the example of drag to demonstrate how a queer resignification of gender may work. She writes that the “critical promise of drag does not have to do with the proliferation of genders, as if a sheer increase in numbers would do the job, but rather with the exposure or the failure of heterosexual regimes ever fully to legislate or contain their own ideals” (1993, p.237).

On the one hand, Butler’s observation about drag might inform the politics of transgenderists who envisage political change being brought about by great numbers of transsexuals coming out of the closet, as if the appearance of numerous people identifying as both/neither might alone effect social change. On the other hand, Butler’s use of drag as an example has resulted in some confusion about the subversiveness of drag per se. When transgenerating practices are used within queer theorising as examples of subversive resignification, there is always the risk that transgenderism will be held up as the icon of transgression, while the day-to-day oppressions faced by transgendered people themselves remain peripheral to queer theorising.

What is the relationship between Butler’s description of queer, and transgenderism? It would appear that transgender politics are compatible with queer theorising in so far as “transgender” is contested as a social category. Transgender texts read in previous chapters readily question categories of man, woman, homosexual, heterosexual, and mentally disordered, but do they hold “transgender” under similar scrutiny or do they exalt it as a highly esteemed way of being, or position it as yet another identity category?

It appears from my reading that more popular transgender texts (Bornstein and Feinberg, for example) seek to reclaim transgender as a category to be inhabited proudly and fought for. However, explicitly postmodern transgender texts (e.g., Stryker’s) attempt to enact that reclaiming without pinning down “transgender” as a social category. Indeed, Stryker (1994) explicitly employs Butler’s queer theorising to

transgender political ends. She draws from Butler's work to describe transgenderism as a transgression of "the highly gendered regulatory schemata that determine the viability of bodies" (p.249). She employs Butler to critique how the bounds of subjectivity are restricted by gender-intelligibility, describing transsexuals as "being compelled to enter a 'domain of abject bodies ...' that in its unlivability encompasses and constitutes the realm of legitimate subjectivity" (p.249). Stryker situates transgenering as an instance of queer performativity, writing that transpeople "often successfully cite the culture's visual norms of gendered embodiment. This citation becomes a subversive resistance when, through a provisional use of language, we verbally declare the unnaturalness of our claim to the subject positions we nevertheless occupy" (p.241). Stryker calls for the reclaiming of words like "creature", "monster", and "unnatural" by transgendered people. In a moment of verbal acrobatics, Stryker reminds us of the connection between "monster" and the Latin "monere" (to warn), suggesting that transgenderism is a warning or portent of the lie of "natural" gender. She holds transsexuality up as a representation of the unnaturalness of all genders and of all claims to simplistically male or female sexed embodiment, completing her warning with the words: "I challenge you to risk abjection and flourish as well as have I. Heed my words, and you may well discover the seams and sutures in yourself" (p.241).

Although queer theorising clearly offers insights which are useful for transgender theorising, as well as for lesbiantrans political activism and theorising broadly, there are some concerns about what is overlooked by queer. Here, I will discuss some critiques of queer generally and in the following chapter I focus on how these concerns about queer relate specifically to transgenderism and transpeople.

Queer critiques

Unlike the early lesbian and gay movement, which had both ideological and practical links to the left, black activism and feminism, today's 'queer' politicians seem to operate in an historical and ideological vacuum. 'Queer' activists focus on 'queer' issues, and racism, sexual oppression and economic exploitation do not qualify, despite the fact that the majority of 'queers' are people of color, female or working class.

(Smith, 1993, p.13)

Some authors have expressed criticisms of queer theorising on the grounds of its exclusivity to those whose lives allow them the leisure and privilege to approach sexuality and gender from academic perspectives. This criticism is directed specifically at queer theorising, rather than at lesbigaytrans theorising in general, because of the inaccessibility of the language and theoretical frameworks through which queer theorising is often articulated. Because queer is worked variously through postmodern, psychoanalytic, poststructuralist, and literary theoretical frameworks, some critics are concerned that queer theorising is too far removed from the material, lived realities of "queer people". To a large extent, I agree with this criticism and will elaborate on this theme in Chapter Twelve. Here, however, I will focus briefly on ways in which queer has been critiqued by authors who support queer agendas but are concerned that queer is used too often as an umbrella term that subsumes and then fails to address related political agendas.

Queer does clearly attempt to address questions of gender, but how well does queer acknowledge the work already done in this area by feminists, and take on board their (our) current agendas? Do queer and feminist theorising ultimately work together or against one another?

Danuta-Walters (1996) is concerned that within queer theorising "too often, gender is not *complicated* but merely ignored, dismissed, or 'transcended.'" (p.845). She suggests that queer is more concerned with following the transgressive-trend, than

actually addressing issues of gender inequity. She writes, "I worry, too, about the romanticization of the margins and of the outlaw that this emphasis on 'gender bending' often accompanies. Rearranging the signs of gender too often becomes a substitute for challenging gender inequity" (Danuta-Walters, 1996, p.856).

Indeed, the spectre of uncritical gender multiplicity could be construed as undoing (or at least detracting from) feminist efforts to challenge the power relations which maintain inequity between the categories "woman" and "man". Danuta-Walters perceives that, in part, queer strives for a "vision of genderless nonnormativity". She questions whether this is "just a postmodern version of a liberal pluralist 'if it feels good, do it' ethos", and is wary that "the images/signifiers for [gender-]transcendence ... are suspiciously male", asking provocatively: "If the phallus has been replaced by the dildo as the prime signifier of sexual transgression, of queerness, how far have we really come, so to speak?" (Danuta-Walters, p.846).

Both Danuta-Walters and Martin (1994) critique the privileging of *crossing* as politically significant. They suggest that through this emphasis on crossing, queer approaches to gender obscure feminist goals, positioning feminism as outdated and boring relative to the trendy queerness of gender-crossing. Danuta-Walters points out some of the blind spots in queer which this implies:

Clearly, cross-dressing, passing, and assorted tropes of postmodern delight are sexier, more fun, more inventive than previous discourses of identity and politics. ... this trope becomes vacuous when it is decontextualized, bandied about as the new hope for a confused world. Theories of gender as play and performance need to be intimately and systematically connected with the power of gender ... to constrain, control, violate, and configure. Too often, mere lip service is given to the specific historical, social, and political configurations that make certain conditions possible and others constrained.

(Danuta-Walters, 1996, p.855)

This particular feminist concern is interesting because, to read this perspective on queer in isolation, it may appear that queer would be better suited to addressing transgender than feminist politics. Yet, despite the fact that gender-crossing has come to be queer's fetish, transgenderists (as will become evident in Chapter Eleven) are just as wary of queer as feminists are.

While some feminists are critical of queer's erasure of lesbian feminist agendas, other feminists challenge queer on the grounds of ethnocentrism. Anzaldúa (1991) argues that

white middle-class lesbians and gay men frame the terms of the [queer] debate. It is they who have produced queer theory and for the most part their theories make abstractions of us colored queers. They control the production of queer knowledge in the academy and in the activist communities. ... They police the queer person of color with theory. ... Their theories limit the ways we think about being queer.
(p.251)

I conclude this chapter with Anzaldúa's words because what they articulate resonates through this and the following two chapters.

In this chapter I have argued that, while queer theorising offers useful insights for transgenderism, questions of "gender" are often not addressed well, thus limiting the potential of queer to contribute to transgender theorising. I have also mentioned the apparent exclusion of "race" from queer (and transgender) agendas, a point which I expanded on in the previous chapter. In the following chapter, I engage with critiques of the "production of queer knowledge" that obscures the lived realities of transgender persons. In the final chapter, I discuss how the academy operates so that queer academics may be understood to "police" others with "theory".

CHAPTER ELEVEN: QUEER ETHICS

A queer ethics ... would support and nurture the queer in all of us - both by questioning all notions of fixed, immutable identities and by articulating a plurality of differences among us in the hope of forging new bonds and allegiances. ... queer ethics would stress the interrelatedness of different, and at times conflicting, communities.

(Däumer, 1992, p.103)

As discussed in the previous chapter, some critics of queer theory are concerned with the privileging of transgressive political acts over difficulties experienced by so-called “queer” individuals. For example, Danuta-Walters writes: “I would prefer queer theorists spend a bit more time on the mundane figure of the working-class lesbian mother and the horrible spectacle of the removal of her child than on the endless rhapsodies for drag and dildos” (1996, p.865). Namaste echoes this concern from a transgender perspective, writing: “critics in queer theory write page after page on the inherent liberation in the transgression of gender codes, but they have nothing to say about the precarious position of the transsexual woman who is battered, and who is unable to access a woman’s shelter because she was not born a biological woman” (1996, p.184). These two authors simultaneously highlight many queer theorists’ apparent lack of concern for the material effects of “gender”, and the romanticising of gender transgression.

I want to use Däumer’s vision of queer ethics as a reference point throughout this chapter, not because I think it will make the relationship among lesbian and trans politics and communities magically easy, but because I think, for all their differences, those communities can derive mutual benefit from the insights and strengths they offer. I am acutely aware of the pain that results when, in the attempt to challenge oppressive norms and power dynamics, people from these communities misguidedly struggle against one another. I am frequently reminded of the devastating effects of this

struggle for individuals, particularly individuals who do not “fit” easily within identity categories, who challenge even the minority groups within which they exist, and who sit uncomfortably “between” conflicting communities (e.g., MTF lesbians). I certainly do not offer “queer” as a glib way of sweeping past these individuals’ experiences of marginalisation within lesbigaytrans communities. Rather, I evoke Däumer’s vision as an acknowledgment of the intense conflicts and differences which need to be negotiated whenever these communities and politics are worked together, and as a reminder that we can only work together if we each come from a place of support, nurturing and respect.

Queer does not work as a term encompassing lesbigaytrans agendas (Warner and Berlant, 1995), but sets up its own exclusions and political hierarchies. Just as O’Driscoll argues that using queer “as an umbrella term ultimately avoids rather than clarifies the relationship between queer theory and lesbian and gay studies” (1996, p.32), so does the umbrella image misrepresent the contentious relationship between transgender and queer theorising. Although queer is purported to refer to a spectrum of lesbigaytrans identities and politics, the way queer is often used suggests that the main concern of queer is to focus on the lesbian / gay aspect of that spectrum. Numerous texts have been published within the past decade with queer in the title, but many of those texts focus exclusively or almost exclusively on questions of sexuality, foregrounding lesbian and gay concerns and almost completely ignoring questions of bisexuality, transsexuality or transgenderism.⁸³ Furthermore, when transgenering is

⁸³ Library searches using the term “queer” as a reference point support this claim. In searching for books held by our university library, I found that many texts bearing the title “queer” are explicitly about (homo)sexuality (e.g., LeVay (1996), where this focus is stated in the subtitle). Other texts appear to proclaim themselves as experts in “queer” (without explicitly narrowing the field of study to (homo)sexualities) yet fail to acknowledge transsexual / transgender aspects of queer (e.g. Jagose, 1996; Warner, 1993; Morton, 1996). Still other texts claim a broad sweep of queer studies, yet provide further examples of the marginalisation of transsexual / transgender concerns within queer. For example, Beemyn’s (1996) edited collection titled “queer studies” which, to its credit, includes two out of sixteen articles specifically on transsexuality. It is a telling point, however, that both of these articles are principally concerned with the elision of transsexuality; first within queer theory (Namaste,

considered by some “queer” authors, reading their work more closely may reveal that the author is primarily interested in using gender-crossing as an example than actually addressing issues which face transgender people. (For instance, Butler’s writing about transsexuality prioritises a particular kind of academic performativity over writing about the day-to-day struggles of transpeople.)

Queer Alienation of Transsexuals

[Q]ueer theory has undermined the very possibility of transgender identity.

(Namaste, 1996, p.198)

Namaste is critical of how queer theorising foregrounds the intellectual potentialities of transgenderism relative to the day-to-day struggles of transsexual people. This is as much about the marginalising of transgenderism as it is about the academic context of queer theory within interdisciplinary fields where attention is focused on “textual meanings, without connecting these significations to the material relations in which they are embedded” (1996, p.184). One particular queer theorist whose work Namaste

1996) and then within historical and clinical approaches to transsexual people who are post-transitionally “gay” (Rosario, 1996). A cross-database CD-ROM search for articles and books published in English between 1990 and 1998 revealed that 213 titles included the word “queer”. Of these titles, 141 also included the words “homosexual”, “homosexuality”, or “homosexuals”; 87 titles included the word “gay”; and 75 of the 213 titles featured one of the words “lesbian”, “lesbianism”, or “lesbians”. Predictably, only ten of the 213 titles included the words “bisexual”, “bisexuality” or “bisexuals”, while sixteen of the titles included one of the words “transsexual”, “transsexuals”, “transsexuality”, “transgender”, or “transgenderism”. Although searching only within titles provides a very superficial glance at how gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender concerns are prioritised within queer, the stark differences revealed by the prevalence of these words in titles does support my claim that transgender concerns are often marginalised within queer writings.

critiques is Judith Butler. Unlike many queer authors, Butler does write specifically about transsexuality. However, it is debatable whether her motives for writing about transsexuality work with or against transgender goals.

Namaste's critique of Butler demonstrates why transgenderists have reason to be wary of queer theorising.⁸⁴ One of Namaste's concerns is that Butler discusses transsexuality in such a way that transsexual subjectivity is elided and transsexual existence is reduced to an allegorical state. The criticism here is that, by employing such theorising, Butler is hailed as one of academia's "experts" on "gender", with many readers overlooking how she renders the transsexual subject. That Butler is a skilled writer and theoretician becomes more important (in terms of the credit her work receives) than the effect of her argument from the point of view of transsexual and transgender readers. To follow Namaste's line of argument, it would be useful for the reader to have seen Jenny Livingstone's much-cited film, "Paris is Burning", and read Butler's discussion of this film (in Chapter Four of "Bodies that Matter").

Livingstone's film documents a drag ball in Harlem and provides fertile ground for multilayered discussions of class, race, and gender(-crossing). Butler's analysis of this film focuses on one of the characters: Venus Extravaganza, a transgendered sex worker who is murdered by a client. Namaste demonstrates how Butler's discussion brings the transsexual figure into queer theorising but could be seen as failing to provide a useful analysis for transpeople. As a result, Butler receives academic acclaim for work which passes as publishable under the title "queer" but which completely ignores transgender political agendas.

Namaste describes Butler's reading of Venus Extravaganza's murder, writing:

When Venus Extravaganza is murdered ... Butler writes that her death represents 'a tragic misreading of the social map of power.' For Butler,

⁸⁴ For a more comprehensive transgender critique of Butler's treatment of the transsexual subject, see Prosser (1998).

Extravaganza does not escape her situation; rather, she is treated as women are treated - especially women of color.

In this interpretation, Butler elides Extravaganza's transsexual status. Here is the point: Venus Extravaganza was killed because she was a transsexual. ... Since Butler has reduced Extravaganza's transsexuality to an allegorical state, she cannot conceptualize the specificity of violence with which transsexuals ... are faced.

(Namaste, 1996, p.188)

So, according to Namaste, Butler is interested in presenting a queer analysis where gendered and racial bodies take centre-stage, and power relations play a critical role. But, in so doing, Butler fails to give prominence to the part played by Venus Extravaganza's transgender identity. And for Namaste, of course, this is the very feature of Venus Extravaganza's life - and murder - that absolutely must be foregrounded. For Butler, as one of the most prolific and frequently cited queer theorists, to not foreground transgenderism in this discussion signals a reluctance on the part of "queer" to prioritise transgender goals.

Namaste is also critical of Butler's framing of drag queens and transsexuals such that the former are seen to "expose compulsory sex/gender relations" (Namaste, 1996, p.188) while the latter are assumed to perform an "uncritical miming" of those relations. Namaste's objection here is to the forced separation between transsexuals and drag queens. This separation poses a threat to (inclusive) transgender politics. Namaste points to the potential for using such a framework for anti-transsexual purposes. The division between transsexuals and drag queens already exists within transgender communities and, as Namaste reminds us, this rift is problematic for the development of a transgender politics of inclusivity. Transsexuals' political activism is overlooked, Namaste argues, in Butler's attempt to deploy the transsexual for her own theoretical purposes, rather than for the purpose of advancing transsexual/transgender theorising.

Another way in which "queer" alienates transsexuals is by focusing on issues of "sexuality" without adequate attention to issues of "gender". For instance, Tierney

draws our attention to the images used on Queer Nation's posters: images of same-sex couples kissing and passionately entwined. Tierney (drawing from Hennessy) critiques the way these images of queer "threaten to erase the intersections of sexuality with class as well as the gender and racial histories that still situate queer men and women differently" (Hennessy, 1995, p.145). The point I would add, however, is that these images of queer most explicitly ignore any part that transsexuals may play in "queer" (except perhaps those transsexuals who also happen to identify as gay/lesbian). Not only do these images of queer ignore transsexuals, they most certainly alienate transsexuals who do not want to be - or see any reason to be - connected with homosexual desires and the associated politics.

Queer Ethics

The epigraph for this chapter encourages us to envisage a queer ethics which may "support and nurture the queer in all of us ... in the hope of forging new bonds and allegiances", and a queer ethics which stresses "the interrelatedness of different, and at times conflicting, communities" (Däumer, 1992, p.103). Here, I suggest that by working from a principle of queer ethics, queer and transgender theorising and politics can inform one another. I propose an approach to theorising and political activism that foregrounds transgender aims, while employing queer arguments and tactics where they are useful for those aims. Such an approach may simultaneously:

- ⇒ ensure that transgender theorising does not reinvent the wheel, falling into the same traps encountered by lesbian and gay identity politics;
- ⇒ provide a critical perspective on instances where queer theorising overlooks transgender issues, highlighting the limitation of theorising that reduces queer to lesbian / gay;
- ⇒ maintain the doors open for coalitional politics among lesbigaytrans people without assuming that there will be consensus;
- ⇒ maintain flow of discussion and debate between transgender and queer theorising, so that each is ultimately informed by the other and challenges the other;

⇒ facilitate critical theorising of the interrelationship between “sexuality” and “gender” and the power/knowledge dynamics implicated by both these terms.

In thinking about the relationship between transgender and queer theorising and politics, I have found Tierney (1997) to provide useful insights. He offers an approach to social change where academic studies and community-based activism “speak to” one another, and where political groups with diverse interests consider one another’s agendas, not just their own. Tierney makes explicit his attempt to avoid couching important theoretical discussions in terms inaccessible to those outside the language communities of postgraduate cultural studies or literary theory courses. Here, queer / poststructuralist insights are articulated in a language that inspires political action.

Tierney argues that although identity politics provide much-needed building blocks for queer research and political activism, it is necessary to question aspects of identity politics that prevent us from building coalitions. In a comment that speaks directly (in my mind) to Däumer’s call for queer ethics, Tierney writes: “Ultimately, in order for us to understand ourselves, we must understand others. In order for us to end discrimination against ourselves, we must seek to end discrimination against others” (1997, p.90). Social change requires coalition-building. Social change requires greater understanding of the social categories through which one is brought into being. Coalition-building and understanding oneself require a mutual understanding and respect for others.

Tierney rightly points out the importance of diverse political tactics for bringing about social change. He writes: “I am uncertain why we so often back ourselves into a corner of accepting either one approach or the other. In political struggle tactics are all-important. As there is little evidence to support the conservative approach, it is equally fallacious to assume that confrontation is necessary at every turn” (1997, p.57). Here the “conservative approach” refers to assimilation: the idea that being as “straight” as possible (at least in appearance) will eventually result in queers being accorded “full human rights”. Working through arguments for and against assimilation has been necessary for the development of transgender / transsexual politics because the very notion that one can “transition” from one gender to another assumes that

assimilation into the “other gender” is ultimately desirable. Transsexual activists campaigning for post-transition rights to heterosexual marriage and altered identification papers - while taking up a politically visible stance themselves - are ultimately campaigning for transsexuals’ “right” to assimilate. On the other hand, transgender activists who refuse to aspire to assimilation as “men” or “women” may be criticised for trying to hold up the figure of the transsexual as the vanguard of the “gender revolution”. Clearly, not all transsexual people can afford to be put in the radically challenging (and, for many, dangerous) position demanded by anti-assimilationists. Hence the appeal of Tierney’s reminder that social change is necessarily brought about through diverse tactics; it is more important to celebrate the diversity among transpeople and keep the discussion going between different factions than to force consensus or engage in a politics of exclusion.

In his chapter titled “Dining at the Table of the Norm”, Tierney reminds us of various reasons why, in his view, assimilation is not an option; why merely being “allowed” to dine at the table is never enough. Instead, he writes that “we must desire - demand - that we are equal partners at the table where we honour one another’s differences. In effect, we not only get to the table, but we also have a say in what’s on the menu. [Ultimately] ... we have the ability to produce meaning” (1997, p.61). This has implications for the position of transsexual people at the “table of the norm”, as well as implications for the relationships among lesbigay and trans people.

First, being “equal partners” and honouring “one another’s differences” means letting go of claims to epistemological and ontological privilege; it means resisting the temptation to base trans-positive arguments on claims to transpeople having “special knowledge” about “gender”. Honouring differences encourages gender and sexuality activists and theorists to look further into the question of “gender”. Instead of transpeople claiming that they can disrupt categories of “man” and “woman” because of their privileged perspective, it is necessary to alter what is on the “gender menu” for all people. For transpeople (and women and queer people generally) to be truly accorded places at the table, the very notion of what “gender” is and what it means to be gendered must be questioned. It is not enough to simply put more gender options

on the menu, for that would be akin to transpeople asking for special permission to dine at the table of the norm.

Second, it is important to be aware of the effects on others of the meanings being produced. It is not enough for meaning production to take place through queer or feminist theorising and political action without consideration of the implications for transpeople, closeted or otherwise. It is not enough for transgender theorising to emerge without consideration of its implications for both sexuality and gender minority groups. It may seem important to some transsexuals to separate sexuality and gender, for the purpose of making human rights claims which might be refused if transsexuality is acknowledged to carry the stigma of both sexuality and gender non-normativity. However, ultimately, sexuality and gender oppressions must be challenged together. It may not make sense, to many lesbian and transpeople, to bring such disparate social groups and political agendas together, but if both agendas are not at least considered simultaneously, there is the risk of changing the menu in ways that dishonour one another's political goals. There is the risk of producing meanings that reinstate hegemonic assumptions about gender or sexuality, thus ultimately weakening the very challenges being made.⁸⁵

Different political groups inevitably rework norms in different ways.⁸⁶ Groups organised around fighting racism, heterosexism, sexism, or transphobia, may benefit from attention to one another's politics and to diversity among means of political action. It may be important not to pretend to present a united front (as in identity

⁸⁵ This point strikes to the heart of Namaste's reading of Butler, discussed earlier in this chapter, as well as being central to the challenges my thesis presents. It is also demonstrated strikingly by the feminist and transgender activism which have taken place simultaneously and in opposition, since 1994, at the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival. (See Prosser, 1998, pp. 171-175, for a more detailed discussion.)

⁸⁶ In writing about "reworking norms", I am not suggesting an uncritical approach to normativity. Rather, I am evoking a Butlerian notion of performatively queering the norm (Butler, 1993, p.232).

politics) but to employ differences as strengths and to celebrate them whenever possible.

In developing an awareness of oppressed groups other than our own, we may need to write about those groups.⁸⁷ Indeed, according to Tierney, to fail to do so would be to maintain divisions and misunderstandings which in turn facilitate the maintenance of hegemonic power relations. We need to understand each other's political agendas and strategies in order to work critically with our own agendas, learning from the work already done within other political movements, and communicating about differences and points of conflict. Tierney, who is a gay man, writes:

Dialogue across difference means that ... I will struggle to understand and write about groups other than my own. Paul Monnette (1994) wrote, 'One of the great breakthroughs I made as a writer in the last ten years was to be able to write about lesbians. Ten years ago I silenced myself because I was so afraid I would get it wrong and come out with a stupid stereotype that wouldn't help anybody. It was my friend Katherine Forrest who said to me, "We have to populate our books with one another".'(p.126) Such sentiments stand in contrast to those who claim to study difference by studying themselves.

(1997, pp.89-90)

⁸⁷ Although, in this chapter in particular, I am discussing political groups with which I, myself, am connected, I have tended to resist the possibility of writing in terms of "we" and "our". This is partly due to my attempt to position myself critically, as a thesis-writer, questioning the very agendas I have had in becoming part of certain political groups during the past ten years. This is also because I do not want to foreground the (queer, feminist, bisexual) politics in which I have been immersed, but wish to focus on (what Tierney's theorising about gay/lesbian politics may mean for) transgenderism. The slippage into first-person pronouns, evident in the next three paragraphs, occurs because I am working directly with Tierney's text, in which he writes "us" and "we".

Just as Tierney inspires me to think about the importance of coalitional politics - the importance of negotiating the differences between and within the areas designated “transgender” and “queer” - so does O’Driscoll caution us to think about whom we are speaking for when we use terms such as queer and transgender. O’Driscoll’s (1996) discussion of outlaw theorising provides insights into when it might be useful to employ the term “outlaw” instead of “queer” or “transgender”.

Outlaw theorising

Queer theorising, like lesbigay theorising, goes some way to assume that to “be” lesbigay constitutes holding certain kinds of political positions. That is, these bodies of theory sometimes overlook the pointed anti-political stance taken up by some lesbigay people. Hence, by giving the “theory” the same labels that people themselves take up, the theory apparently presumes to speak for or about all people who use that label for themselves (O’Driscoll, 1996).⁸⁸ Clearly, this is a mistake, and in Chapters Eight and Nine I addressed this issue by questioning how well “transgender” theorising actually accommodates “transgender” people.

O’Driscoll is concerned about the confusion which results from describing bodies of theoretical work under the same labels that people use to identify themselves (she calls this the label’s “street usage”). Her suggestion for resolving this conflict of meanings is to use the term “outlaw theory” to designate theory which works with a politically subversive agenda (with regard to sexuality / gender). Then terms such as “*gay theory*, *lesbian theory*, *transgender theory* (as many categories as necessary) [could be reserved for describing] ... what Charlotte Bunch calls the ‘*materially* different reality’

⁸⁸ While lesbigaytrans labels suffer the ambiguity of referring both to identities and politics, such confusion has been avoided where other identity-based politics are concerned. For instance, the term “feminism” does not imply that all women support feminist political agendas. (Nevertheless, some feminist work has been criticised for presuming to speak for all women.)

and consequences of particular sexual practices or identities” (italics from original, 1996, p.35). Thus, outlaw theory is not confined to any particular aspect of sexuality and gender transgression, and lesbian/gay/trans theories need not appear to speak as though all people who identify as lesbian/gay/trans identify with outlaw political and theoretical agendas.

So how might “outlaw theorising” work differently from lesbian/gay/trans and queer theorising? O’Driscoll gives examples of how an outlaw reading might differ from a lesbian reading of particular texts; both providing useful but different theoretical insights and analytic perspectives. Here it is necessary to re-word O’Driscoll’s description of outlaw theorising to focus on the potential of outlaw theorising for transgenderism.

According to O’Driscoll, an outlaw reading and a transgender reading would ask different questions about a given text.

The outlaw reading is the macrofocus - what would, in current terminology, have been called a queer reading; it concentrates on a large-canvas deconstruction of the sexual [/gender] ideology underpinning this text and an interrogation of the role that sexual [/gendered] practice plays in the formation of identity, but not on specific sexual [/gender] identities themselves.

(O’Driscoll, 1996, p.38)

Inserting “gender” where O’Driscoll only mentions sexuality enables us to see how her suggestions about outlaw theorising can apply equally well to transgenderism as to lesbian/gay theorising.

This does not resolve concerns about how well “transgender” theorising represents the diversity of transgender people’s perspectives, but it does at least acknowledge that a transgender perspective may not necessarily have gender-transgression as a central agenda. Instead, gender-transgression would be the agenda of outlaw theorising, while transgender theorising would enable readings from transgender

perspectives, highlighting transgender issues. Therefore, outlaw theorising allows us to develop a critical distance between gender-transgression and transgenderism. This makes it possible for people to describe themselves as “transgender”, and to argue from a “transgender perspective”, without necessarily having to adhere to the radical transgender aims of gender transgression. Thus, those people who live transgender lives, but prefer not to support radical politics need no longer be accused of having “false consciousness”, and their perspectives need no longer be eclipsed by those of more radical, vocal, and visible transgenderists.⁸⁹

How might the questions differ, whether one is working from the perspective of theorising transsexuality, transgender theorising, or outlaw theorising? Let's take, as an example, three possible readings of the text about the life of Herculine Barbin, a 19th century hermaphrodite who was raised as a girl and later “discovered” to be a “man”.

One reading of this text might position Herculine as a historical precursor to contemporary transsexuals, in so far as s/he underwent a change in civil status from “girl” to “man”. This approach to studying transsexuality might ask questions about what Herculine “really” was; what contemporary labels might be used to make sense of Herculine's “gender identity”; and how his/her treatment by legal and medical professionals differed from or was similar to the treatment of intersexed people today. Such an approach understands history as linear, does not interrogate relations of power, situates research as non-political, and regards language as a transparent means of communication. I would describe this reading of *Herculine Barbin* as an example of theorising transsexuality.

Another reading of the same text might be more concerned with Herculine's gender ambiguity. Here, questions of interest may relate to how s/he experienced and expressed his/her “gender” within the semantic context of the time, how s/he was ultimately forced to categorise herself as either “man” or “woman”, and how this is different or similar for transgendered people now. Discussion of these questions would

⁸⁹ See Rubin (1998) for a more thorough transgender analysis of the potential for radical political expressions of queerness to eclipse the perspectives of some transpeople.

provide an example of transgender theorising. Here, there is a critical approach to assumptions about “gender identity”: assumptions of the stability of both gendered experience and what gender means across time.

Finally, approaching this text from the point of view of outlaw theorising might suggest the following kinds of questions: What understandings about sex enabled medical and legal professionals of the time to declare Herculine’s “true” sex to be that of a man? To what extent do those assumptions about the truth of sex persist today? What power relations are maintained through such a truth discourse? What effects might those power relations have for transpeople currently? And, most importantly, if those power relations are to be altered, if the discourse of “having a true sex” is to be challenged, what are the political implications of this and what political strategies need to be employed? This approach does not assume to speak for all transpeople, any more than it presumes to speak only for transpeople. Indeed, questioning the notion of “having a true sex” clearly has implications for all people who live in cultures where this notion exists.

Here, outlaw theorising is clearly informed by transgender theorising. Although (in this example) outlaw theorising has explicit implications for how all people understand “sex” - and therefore draws attention away from the figure of the transsexual - the way the question of “sex” is asked assumes familiarity with transgender critiques of “having a true sex”. Thus, unlike some transgender writings, outlaw theorising enables important questions to be asked about “sex” without pretending that these questions have arisen out of an epistemologically and ontologically privileged transgender perspective, and without implying that all transsexual people ought to - or want to - ask these questions. Also, unlike much queer writing, outlaw theorising - because it does not privilege lesbian/gay analyses - can draw sensitively from transgender analyses and experiences. Here, “outlaw” works in so far as it is not owned by lesbian or trans parties.

According to O’Driscoll, “*outlaw theory* moves beyond *queer theory* in that it incorporates the notion of fluidity rather than territorialization and opposition to the fields of study that have focused on identity categories” (1996, p.36). In this respect,

outlaw theorising might offer possibilities to transgenderism which queer theorising does not. But, in order for this to work, the distinction needs to be made between theorising transsexuality, which works from modernist research paradigms (e.g., Lewins, 1995), and outlaw theorising. Here, also, a distinction must be made between totalising theories that attempt to speak for transsexuals (e.g., Feinberg, 1996), and theories with political agendas that are explicitly stated as not being shared by all transsexuals. Outlaw theorising would be the latter. Perhaps this genre of theorising would facilitate discussion among lesbian and trans writers / researchers / activists by bringing together those whose approaches are explicitly critical and politicised.

O'Driscoll suggests *outlaw theorizing* as

a term that follows the original impetus of queer theory - a liberating deconstruction of sexual ideology and categories - without the problematic terminology confusion that negates the insistence on the material reality of specific sexual practices and their consequences. Nor is this new terminology a continuation of opposition between theory and practice: it is, rather ... a distinction between macro- and microfocused analyses; a possibility of productive interplay between two perspectives.

(p.37)

So outlaw theorising might enable us to pursue queer and transgender theoretical and political agendas without the confusion that ensues when identity-labels and theoretical terms are encapsulated within the same word. Here, we may work with a mind to the theoretical and practical implications of what we are writing, without being constrained by the question: whom am I speaking for / about when I engage in "transgender theorising"?

As envisaged by O'Driscoll, outlaw theorising "differentiates those practices that constitute an identity from those that do not" (p.36). O'Driscoll goes on to explain how "[l]esbian theory and gay theory, in this new terminology, concentrate on sexual practice as identity marker. Outlaw theory, in contrast, might investigate the ways in which the breaking of sexual taboos can call identity categories into question without

necessarily constituting an identity” (p.36). Thus, perhaps “outlaw” might be able to do what queer struggles to do: to critique identity without becoming mired by its own popular usage as an identity category. Or, perhaps “outlaw” would just become another term that sex and gender radicals use to describe themselves thus threatening yet again the appropriation, and subsequent crippling, of an otherwise subversive political tool. Indeed, this possibility is foreshadowed by Kate Bornstein’s claims about “gender outlaws”.

The example (of the case of Herculine Barbin) I have presented gives a very limited view of the framework offered by O’Driscoll. But, it does demonstrate the possibility for outlaw theorising to provide readings which queer theorising and transgender theorising may have difficulty doing, because of their explicit (etymological) relation to specific sexuality and gender identities. This also demonstrates the potential for transgender theorising and outlaw theorising to work together, providing analyses which are useful for those working towards social change outside of academic contexts. Whether outlaw theorising would ultimately fall to the same fate as queer theorising, however, is open to debate.

I do not present “outlaw theorising” as a *solution* but as a means of drawing out useful questions that are offered by queer, transgender, and transsexual approaches to the ontologising of “gender” and “transsexuality”. Drawing out the useful questions means taking a step back from the cacophony of intra-community debates and considering, from the point of view of queer ethics, what kinds of questions provide ways of “nurturing the queer in all of us” and “articulating ... differences ... in the hope of forging new ... allegiances” (Däumer, 1992, p.103).

Conclusion

In Chapters Ten and Eleven I have discussed various aspects of “queer theory” with regard to its implications for transgender theorising. The advent of queer theory has signalled the further working of lesbian/gay/trans discussions within academia. That is, the

development of critical studies of sexuality and gender - studies which pose explicitly politicised challenges to ontological and hegemonic assumptions - which have the privilege of being located within academic discourses. Inevitably, this has brought about some unhappy marriages: the marriage of lesbigay and trans concerns under the term “queer”, and the marriage of queer (political / community) and academic agendas within the field of “queer studies”. Just as “queer” fails to serve the political and theoretical needs of many transpeople, so too is it questionable how well academia can serve either transgender or queer agendas.

Once again, I turn to Tierney’s call for the importance of maintaining connections between agendas both of academic critique and of political activism, and between the political agendas of diverse lesbigaytrans groups. I turn also to Däumer’s vision of queer ethics. I do not merely envisage selected “queer” people being invited to dine at the table of the norm by virtue of their being able to articulate their socio-political positions in academic jargon. Bringing queer studies into the university - putting queer possibilities on the academic menu - is not enough. Just as it is foolhardy to think that sexuality and gender oppressions can be challenged in isolation, so too would it be perilous to engage in queer academic work without considering the exclusions (socio-economic, geographic, linguistic, educational) which enable that work. Queer ethics, for me, is as much about challenging the elision of bisexual and transsexual possibilities within queer, as it is about interrogating the academization of queer and transgender discussions. It is this latter concern that I take up in the following chapter.

PART SIX: ACADEMIC CONCERNS

I have been writing about the uncertainty of the categories “man” and “woman”; about people who cross over or live between those categories; about discursive manoeuvres that attempt to reinstate those categories as “truth”; and about political activism which forces into public view the fragility of those categories. My focus for this discussion has been on discourses that ontologise transsexuality. In Part Three, I discussed ways in which psycho-medical institutions simultaneously make it possible for “transsexuality” to exist in its current form(s) while *invalidating* those who wish to live between “man” and “woman”. (The “transition” must be complete - for legal rights to be accorded - and can only be completed by those who “fit” the criteria.) In Chapter Seven, I demonstrated how psychoanalytic theory might be used to challenge the psycho-medical quest for certainty and the knowability of “gender”. In Chapter Eight, I drew on writings by transgendered authors, showing how they present a challenge to psycho-medical constructions of transsexuality and the quest for gender normativity. In Part Five, I introduced aspects of queer theories which inform and stand in tension with transgender theorising and political activism.

Each of Parts Three, Four, and Five focuses on specific academic approaches to transsexuality. These Parts discuss how academic processes are brought to transsexuality with the various aims of diagnosing, curing, understanding, knowing, naming, reclaiming, validating, and politicising transsexuality.

In the late twentieth century, it has become possible for transsexual and transgendered people to be “out” in the academy and to openly initiate or take part in the dialogues of theorising transsexuality and of transgender theorising. These dialogues extend well beyond the academy, including published works such as autobiographies, theatrical performances (e.g., Kate Bornstein’s *Hidden: A Gender*) and the works of political activists who may or may not be within academic settings. This chapter poses

questions about the relationship between academia and transsexuality: what happens when transsexuality is theorised within academia; how does transgender theorising operate within academia, and whom does this serve?

Addressing these questions is necessarily a reflexive task: unsettling the very thesis within which they are posed. It evokes questions posed at the beginning of this project: who am I to be writing about transgenderism; what are my motives in focusing my doctoral research on transsexuality?

CHAPTER TWELVE: TRANSGENDERISM IN ACADEMIA

Research and Social Change

Voters in Colorado, or homophobes with baseball bats, will not be persuaded by discussion of gender ambiguity; I suspect it will exacerbate their anxiety. Telling them that I am not 'really' a lesbian is different from saying it to readers of Signs; what the Signs audience can understand as deconstruction becomes simply a return to the closet in others' eyes.

(Phelan, 1993, p.782; quoted in Danuta-Walters, 1996, p.856)

How does research motivated by queer or transgender agendas relate to social change? When might academic work from transgender or queer perspectives not accord with the “experiences” of queer and transgender people? Danuta-Walters is concerned with the relationship between theorising identities and the politics of what is referred to as our “lived realities”. She suggests that the theorising of queer needs to be worked more carefully to connect with the specifics of gendered existence, rather than simply making intellectual statements or “degenerating into a self-styled rebel stance” (Danuta-Walters, 1996, p.856). She points to the “paradox of visibility” where the relatively high level of exposure to queer characters and people through popular media is not actually an indication that homophobia is on the decline.

In the epigraph, Danuta-Walters draws from Phelan to demonstrate the distance that lies (often unacknowledged) between queer theorising and grass-roots activism. Just as Danuta-Walters and Phelan are concerned about how academic and radical political articulations of queer may be “heard” by uninitiated audiences, so have I been

concerned about how the motivations behind my research may be interpreted by transsexual and transgendered readers and participants.

A number of the transpeople involved in this research mentioned their interest in seeing that attitudes towards transsexuality and discrimination against transsexual people were challenged. For most, being involved in this research is understood as one avenue towards presenting that challenge and, ultimately, bringing about social change.

Each interviewee and workshop participant who talked about his/her visions for social change has a slightly different understanding of exactly how I, as a researcher, might be an agent for change. Sarah understands the research in positivist terms of “discovery”. She hopes that being involved in research on transsexuality will increase understanding of transsexuality - in the sense of accumulating knowledge - so that future transsexuals will not be met with the dearth of information she found when she began enquiring. Pat and Kal saw me as a potential networking agent for transsexual and transgendered people in Aotearoa / New Zealand. Both were keen for me to put them in touch with other politically minded transpeople. Babe saw the potential for this research to break down stigmatising images of transsexuals through performing an educational role. When I asked him what had motivated him to participate in the research, he said: “I suppose there’s ... a desire to educate the public that we are not monsters, we are not perverts”. Other transpeople around the country (people who had talked with me about my research, but who were not participants) had discussions with one another about what they thought I was or was not doing through the research, and what the value of the research might be to them. Through these kinds of discussion it became obvious to me that, regardless of my own political agendas, this research was making connections with others’ political projects and potentially being appropriated for their purposes.

Despite my best intentions, it has always been questionable in my mind whether my research would fill the roles others envisaged for it. Does this research “discover” things about transsexuality which could provide useful “information” to future transsexuals? Is it the role of a (“non-transsexual”) doctoral student studying

transsexuality to set up a national networking system for transpeople? Does this thesis break down stigmatising images of transsexuals? To what extent might it ever “educate the public”? And, importantly for my peace of mind, is it ethical for me to use these participants’ transcript material knowing that this research is simply not able to play the roles each of them envisaged when they agreed to participate in this project? Can I use their transcript material knowing that they may have participated in the study under “false pretences”; not because there was any deception within the research process, but because they and I work from fundamentally different understandings about “knowledge”, social change, and the role of the researcher?⁹⁰

Despite the persistent uncertainty (represented by my unanswered questions), throughout the many permutations this work has undergone before becoming crystallised in its current written form, there have been two factors guiding what this research *does*. For one, this research takes the form of a doctoral thesis. Before setting out on any grandiose political schemes, I have had to think very carefully about what constitutes a doctoral thesis, and how I can achieve this academic goal without sacrificing the political agendas that drive and inspire my work. The other guiding factor has been my conviction about the importance of critical inquiry and education for social change. This means being ever-aware of the interconnection of academic work and political activism; the potential for research projects to form the basis of educational talks, seminars, lectures, and workshops; and the role of academic writing in inspiring further research and critical thought. This, in turn, means presenting my work in a form that is sensitive to a diverse audience. I do not want to inspire only other academics to think about these issues. Yet, contrary to Babe’s suggestion, I cannot afford to think simply in terms of “educating the public”. This kind of research must simultaneously reach transgender activists, queer academics, psycho-medical professionals, and undergraduate students who are just beginning to question their own sexuality and gender “identities”. In order to try and forge links among these

⁹⁰ Perhaps this is one of the contradictions we must work with (rather than try to resolve) when doing critical poststructuralist research. Clearly, I have used the transcript material in my thesis, and I have also pursued this research out of a strong sense of the importance of social change. The point of contention, then, is just what form such “social change” might take.

disparate contributors to the discussion which is this thesis, I need to find a language which speaks to all of these parties, without losing the critical edge offered by a poststructuralist analysis.

Academia and Activism

Hinchey (1998) reminds us how a critical academic approach to research is crucial, while demonstrating a style of writing that reaches out to readers rather than baffling with complexity and overwhelming with jargon. She tells a story, highly pertinent to my research, about how critical theory gives us a useful tool for questioning taken-for-granted assumptions. Hinchey writes:

In a Zen parable, a young fish asks an elder fish to define the nature of the sea. The young one complains that although everyone talks constantly about the sea, he can't see it and he can't really get a clear understanding of what it is. The wise elder notes that the sea is all around the young one; it is where he was born and where he will die; it is a sort of envelope, and he can't see it because he is part of it.

Such is the difficulty of coming to understand our own cultural beliefs and how they influence our actions. ...

It is in overcoming this difficulty that critical theory is especially valuable. It offers us a new perspective to use in analyzing our experiences, as the fish would get an entirely new perspective on the sea if he were able to consider it from a beach. The lens of critical theory refocuses our vision of the place we've lived all our lives. ... the usefulness of critical theory is that it helps open our minds to possibilities we once found unimaginable. ... Once such heresies are imagined, we can explore them. And maybe in our explorations, as in the explorations of other revolutionaries, we can change the face of the way things are, forever.

(Hinchey, 1998, p.15)

The highlighting of “are” occurs in Hinchey’s original text, and is absolutely pivotal to my text. Although Sarah thought she was participating in research that could “discover” something new about transsexuality, she was actually participating in research that sought to re-view how transsexuality is. Where Babe seeks to “educate the public” about transsexuals, I seek to inspire readers to think critically about what (and why) transsexuals **are** at all. It is also crucial to acknowledge the political implications of applying a critical approach to researching transgenderism / transsexuality. Despite Myra’s protestations about not wanting to be involved in social change, this project’s rethinking of transsexuality through a critical framework - questioning the very ontology of transsexuality (and therefore of gender) - implies radical social change. Despite my critique of transgenderists’ talk about the “gender revolution” (which is supposedly spearheaded by visible, vocal, “out” transsexuals) I wholeheartedly support the notion of “revolution”, but I am talking, not about a reshuffling of social categories, but about a revolution of meaning. This revolution must work simultaneously through critical thought and political activism. The social change envisaged here is part of an on-going process of discussion, struggle, negotiation, and working with contradiction.

For critical thought and political activism to work together, these different approaches to social change need a mode of communication. The language and style of writing of much poststructuralist theorising puts it beyond the reach of many potential readers (both within and outside the academy). It is here that I see the role of education as being crucial. Education, for me, is about communicating complex ideas, discussions, and theoretical arguments to diverse audiences. Education is about translating jargon-filled texts in specialist areas to people who can benefit from the ideas but may not be experts in the jargon required to read the texts.⁹¹ It is in this sense that I come closest, perhaps, to Babe’s educational agenda, in that I set out to write about transsexuality in a way that engages with a variety of political, clinical, and academic perspectives on

⁹¹ Education is also about working with students who aspire to become jargon-experts, but it seems that role is already being fulfilled, judging by the number of jargon-filled queer texts being published currently.

transsexuality, with a view to encouraging critical thinking in readers who themselves may be interested for political, personal, professional, or academic reasons.

I argue that we need to challenge the ontologising of transsexuality (and gender) in order to destabilise the assumptions upon which (trans)gender and sexuality oppressions are founded. I suggest that poststructuralist frameworks provide us with some tools to make this challenge. Here, like Tierney, I envisage a “cultural politics based on a postmodern interpretation of cultural studies”, and reject “a postmodernism that analyzes issues without a political project in mind” (1997, p.24). This is therefore an approach to research that asserts “the primacy of cultural politics in society, in institutions and in groups”, and assumes that “the point is not merely to study the world but to change it” (p.24). Research that works from a critical postmodern perspective aims to “make the axes of power transparent” (Mohanty, 1990; cited in Tierney, 1997, p.25). The tools offered by such a critical approach are useful (as demonstrated through queer theorising) for questioning taken-for-granted assumptions, but may be criticised for their exclusivity and élitism. I therefore suggest that challenging some hegemonic structures (such as gender and sexuality oppressions) while maintaining others (such as educational and economic divisions) ultimately weakens the challenge being presented and limits its scope, keeping grass-roots challenges and academic challenges from speaking to one another and working well together.

In the previous chapter I outlined how challenging multiple oppressions means simultaneously developing a coalitional politics as well as an intellectual critique of the societal structures and theoretical premises which enable and maintain those oppressions. In order for that intellectual critique to work outside of the academic context within which it was formulated, it must - at some time - be couched in terms that are more practical, more directly applicable, and more intelligible in grass-roots contexts. For the coalitional politics and the academic critique to work together, they need a common language. Much poststructuralist theorising talks past the political movements it most concerns, thus maintaining the division between those who can and cannot afford tertiary education and effecting a paralysis in otherwise politically motivated academics.

Even those of us working within universities can become overwhelmed by the obtuseness of some queer / poststructuralist writings. I wrote in Chapter Four about my own difficult process of moving from working within radical feminist politics (and an academic background in behavioural psychology) to trying to do research within a poststructuralist feminist framework. This was difficult because many of my basic assumptions - political and academic - were being questioned. But what contributed even more to my sense of intellectual inertia and political paralysis was my feeling of being unable to speak. The poststructuralist framework which I was starting to use in my work not only challenged fundamental aspects of my approach to language, it failed to give me a "replacement language" which fitted with my political and pedagogical agendas. For me, research is always about politics and about education. My research is a process through which ideas about social change are articulated in ways that reach out to and engage with those who are involved in social movements on various levels. Therefore, one of the struggles I have faced is to work with theoretical challenges offered through poststructuralism without unthinkingly reproducing that language through my own writing.

For me, queer and transgender theorising within academia are only valuable in so far as they connect with the grass-roots political activism to which they relate, and speak to people who "are" queer or transgendered.⁹² Malinowitz (1992) launches a strident critique of the exclusivity and academic inaccessibility of queer theorising. She begins by comparing queer academic work to scientific research, and asks how appropriate it is to expect academic writings to be "accessible" to a general audience. Here, she concedes that to some extent, "the complexity that theory seeks to articulate is diluted

⁹² I write here about the importance of academic theorising "connecting with grass-roots political activism", but this is not to say that academic critique should be sacrificed for the sake of such a "connection". Although it is not the focus of this chapter, it is important to remember that oppressive and hegemonic notions sometimes permeate grass-roots movements. It is for this reason, that an academic critique needs to be brought to bear on such movements: not so that the theorist can critique from afar, but so that academia and activism can work together.

when it is forced to abandon the precision of its own vernacular” but she goes on to argue that “the notion that critical reflection about our lives is work only for philosopher kings and queens - even queer ones - is eerily reminiscent of the years when homophile societies turned to ‘experts’ in psychology, law, sociology, and medicine for information about themselves” (1992, p. 168). Hence, she unsettles the assumption that queer academic work is necessarily more benign than other academic approaches to theorising “queer” lives. There is a sense here that the very act of bringing queer studies into the university sets up exclusions which work in fundamental ways against the liberatory goals which underpin queer agendas.

Malinowitz describes how, within academia, “the benefits and liabilities of privilege have kept the interdisciplinary ‘special studies’ programs - women’s, labor, African American, and others - contorting for more than two decades to locate themselves between the magnetic poles of community and ivory tower” (1992, p.170). Some writers working within these fields have explicitly discussed the importance of “accessible language” to maintaining connections between their academic work and their political and community affiliations. For instance, Malinowitz describes Patricia Hill Collins as writing that “she was committed to making the text ‘accessible to more than the select few fortunate enough to receive elite educations. ...Educated elites typically claim that only they are qualified to produce theory and believe that only they can interpret not only their own but everyone else’s experiences’” (p.170). Thus, the politics of whose voice gets heard within academia begins to look frighteningly similar to the politics of whose voice gets heard within mainstream media.⁹³ What are we achieving if we reinstitute within an academic setting the same power dynamics and debates as already exist elsewhere? Is this not just another example of pitting one group of queers against another - creating exclusions within exclusions - and ultimately losing sight of the common agendas through which we can all benefit?

⁹³ The politics of whose voice gets heard through mainstream media takes a bizarre twist in the case of talk-shows where, more and more, “just” being gay / queer / trans is “not weird enough”. Subsequently, talk show hosts seek progressively more improbable permutations of “perversity” in their discussants, resulting in consternation from some gaylesbitrans viewers about what kinds of “weirdos” get to represent “the rest of us” on talk shows (Gamson, 1998).

In some respects, transgender theorising rides into academia on the coat tails of gay and lesbian studies which themselves originated, not as academic fields, but as politically motivated writings by various gay, lesbian, and feminist authors: writings that were then taken up and studied within women's studies courses, for instance (Malinowitz, 1992). Malinowitz asks: "At what cost comes lesbian and gay studies' bid for academic legitimacy...?", and: "To what extent does it see itself as an agent of social transformation, to what extent a new route to tenure?" (p.172). That this field of study sets itself up as exclusive - because of its institutional links and epistemological points of reference - is evidenced by Malinowitz's cutting commentary:

Right now, overrepresented by prestigious academic institutions, drawing on closed-circuit calls for papers, using a post-structuralist vocabulary that current unabridged dictionaries haven't yet caught up with, heavily intrareferential and overwhelmingly white, the queer theorist network often resembles a social club open only to residents of a neighborhood most of us can't afford to live in. If a term like 'radical alterity' doesn't mean anything to you, you won't even be able to fill out the application.

(1992, p.172)

This critique is by no means intended to suggest that academic approaches to queer must necessarily threaten queer political agendas. Indeed, theorising is envisaged here as political. As Malinowitz's reading of Fuss's *Inside/Out* suggests, Fuss "seems interested in generating a call to action - and convincingly suggests that we can act with theory" (p.174). This critique is about finding ways to validate and bring together the academic and the political.

Malinowitz argues that, whilst queer theorising does well to locate and work through problems within earlier attempts to theorise gender and sexuality through identity politics, it often appears blind to its own glaring shortcomings. She writes:

When queer theorists look back at 1970s lesbian feminism or the nascent years of identity politics, it's across a rift created by the shift in paradigms from untheorized essentialism to social constructionism. In hindsight, it's easy to locate the underlying fault line upon which our essentialist structures were so precariously built. Much harder to recognize, though, is another fundamental weakness that runs deep beneath our current constructions of reality. ... that vulnerable spot lies in precisely the place where a prodigious, arcane discourse and a vigorous community of considerable transformative power fail to grasp each other's significance.

(Malinowitz, 1992, p.182)

This problem of queer theory's failure to connect with the lived realities of *queer* people is echoed by Namaste. Namaste endorses a mode of transgender theorising that maintains links among political activists, academics, and transgender community more broadly. Namaste writes:

Call me old-fashioned, but I believe in the elaboration of organic intellectual practices, in which academics create knowledge useful to activist communities and provide a productive translation of civil and political societies. Theory is a practice in itself - not just an interpretation of the social world, but a way in which it is legitimated. The reciprocal relations between theory and practice are perhaps best illustrated in our methodologies. That American, humanities-based queer theory expresses little angst over methodology is reason enough to interrogate its project.

(1996, p.197)

Namaste warns against allowing transgender theorising (like queer theory) to become a trendy academic practice of the 1990's that gains academics publications but ultimately becomes politically weakened through the process of institutionalisation.

Throughout this thesis, I have progressively undone one academic approach to transsexuality after another, whilst utilising academic theorising and poststructuralist analysis. I have questioned the epistemological assumptions underlying research through which transsexuality is studied, as an object of positivist empiricist inquiry. I have challenged the clinical and pathologising approach of psycho-medical theorising about transsexuality. I have highlighted problems with attempts at theorising transsexuality through queer theory. Each of these academic approaches to transsexuality has in common an institutional setting which maintains the researcher and the researched at a distance from one another. In the clinical context, this distance is maintained through the assumption that one party is the “professional” (who is implicitly healthy and knowledgeable) while the other party is the patient and research object (who is explicitly unhealthy / abnormal and implicitly naïve). In the context of queer theorising, even while positivist empiricist and psycho-medical approaches to sexuality and gender are critiqued, some distance is often maintained between the theorist and the transsexual. This may be achieved through the use of language which is only accessible to those with postgraduate education in the humanities, or through the maintenance of divisions within queer: divisions that keep transsexuals on the periphery; divisions that maintain academia as an exclusive realm.

Just as I have highlighted various problems with understanding transsexuality through academia, I have also pointed to problems which arise when academic insights are brushed aside too quickly. Transgenderists who are loathe to consider the implications of psychoanalytic theorising of sexed embodiment, and those who fail to learn from the mistakes of lesbian/gay identity-based activism risk investing in a political movement which is ill-informed. Therefore, it is very exciting to see more transgenderists, during the past five years, writing and researching transsexuality from within academia. Here, I see potential for the political motivations of transgenderism and the critical intellectual perspectives of academia being worked together fruitfully.

But how does transgender theorising sit within academia? Will the more active working of transsexuality from transgender academic perspectives lead to yet another

departmental specialty: transgender studies?⁹⁴ Will the advancement of transgender studies enable transgenderism to be a more equitable partner within the queer collective? Is this kind of institutionalisation of transgender studies consistent with the political goals of transgenderism?

I suggest that, despite the importance of working transgenderism through academic and political approaches, there are significant risks in allowing transgender studies (or, for that matter: queer studies) to become a fixture within the institution. The importance of not institutionalising radical political ventures was evidenced recently during the flurry of centennial-commemorations of Oscar Wilde's death. On this topic, Michael Bracewell describes how:

in the heritage-hungry 1990s, [Oscar Wilde] enjoys the secular canonisation of a full-length costume-drama feature film. But, however acceptable he might seem today, Oscar won't be the saint that we'd like him to be. He'd find such a rôle both vulgar and dull. And this is why he matters, and why his life and work comprise a classic manifesto for free thought and disaffection. Oscar authorised a way of life for the generations who followed and perhaps the best executors of his legacy are all of those people who feel that they're somehow different, who don't want any trouble, but would go down fighting to defend their right to be different. Their right to be different, after all, is everyone's right.

(Bracewell, 1997)

⁹⁴ I take the term "transgender studies" as a corollary to gay / lesbian studies which have emerged within academia as an outcome of gay / lesbian political work, and women's or feminist studies which have emerged within academia as an outcome of feminist political work. But, I also take "transgender studies" from Gordene Olga MacKenzie's undergraduate course in "transgender studies", titled "Transgender Identity, Politics and Respresentation", which was taught at the University of New Mexico for the first time in 1997.

To canonise Wilde, for me, is comparable to institutionalising queer / trans challenges. The following discussion is inspired by Tierney's (1997) critique of the institutionalisation of queer.

Using Tierney's metaphor, in the conclusion of Chapter Eleven I wrote that putting queer studies on the academic menu was not enough. What did I mean by that? What would be *enough*? And what role does the academic menu have in producing the menu for the "table of the norm"?

"Transgender Studies"?

The work of transgender studies within university settings is to promote theorising and discussion which is in dialogue with, and which challenges, several decades' studies done "on transsexuals". To carry this out effectively, transgender studies must take not only an interdisciplinary, but a transdisciplinary approach. Here, I am drawing on Tierney's (1997) observations about the place of queer studies in the academy. He suggests that "our work needs to transcend disciplines, or at least not be limited to a traditional disciplinary paradigm", adding that we "need to think of the structure of academe and how knowledge gets located in particular arenas" (p.17). These comments are situated in a discussion about the way that cultural studies, more broadly, function in the academy. Tierney observes that, from the point of view of cultural studies, "academics are viewed as agents who produce knowledge and assume responsibility for its effects in the larger public culture" (p.17). Here, "the university is no longer merely a purveyor of objective concepts but, rather, a central determiner of how society seeks to maintain, or disrupt, the status quo" (p.36). Therefore transgender studies, while located in academia, are explicitly engaged in social change through knowledge production.

If, indeed, transgender studies are engaged in social change through knowledge production, how does this relate to my earlier discussion about the various interpretations of "social change" and "knowledge"? Are we to understand

transgender studies as responding to Babe's desire to "educate the public", Sarah's desire to "discover" things about "transsexuality", or as working towards MacKenzie's (1994) envisaged "Gender Revolution"? A poststructuralist "take" on this question might suggest that transgender studies are not doing, and cannot do, any of these things. Rather, the role of the academic needs to be rethought, as do our understandings of the processes of "social change". Here, any "change" may be conceptualised not in terms of grand-scale revolution, or even in terms of a cohesive "social change movement". Rather, social change may occur via many micro-level challenges, negotiations, and reconceptualisations. Here, academics cannot presume to either instigate or inform any "social change movement", for there is no coherent "movement" at all. Instead, academics may continue to engage in critical inquiry, seeking to articulate political issues and contradictory tensions (of which they, themselves, are necessarily a part) rather than seeking resolutions or changes in any simplistic sense.⁹⁵

Making the link between social change movements and academic work requires some attention to language. Tierney notes there is "a certain irony that those who engage in the study of popular culture often do so by using the most obtuse and abstract language" (1997, p.18). Therefore, he argues not only for transdisciplinary communication, but for communication between those working in academia and those involved in social change movements in the wider community. He argues "for our vernacular to be stripped down and usable by the public and for an engagement that is usually absent in the academy" (p.18). These suggestions are particularly pertinent where queer and transgender theorising are concerned. Here, there is a most obvious

⁹⁵ Baudrillard (1993) discusses in greater detail the relationship between "intellectuals" and social change movements, writing: "Why do intellectuals continue to speak? I suppose it's because they do so always in the hope that they will change some people's outlook, or that they will transform the world" (p.77). Although intellectuals' role relates to bringing about change, one needs to be careful in considering *how* such change might come about. Baudrillard reminds us that the "world does not live in utopia, but intellectuals are carriers of a kind of utopia. ... When an intellectual sacrifices himself [sic] in order to become the mere spokesman of a group or a class, he [sic] is finished" (p.80).

link between political activism and academic writing, and a clear drive towards building communities. To discuss transsexuality in academic contexts and not connect with day-to-day struggles of transsexual people, or transgender political movements, would be a mistake. Similarly, “to suggest changes that are theoretically void of any historical, social or cultural understanding risks repeating failures of the past. The challenge, then, is to map out a cartography of our lives that accounts for previous interpretations and creates the conditions for a reformulation of the academy” (Tierney, p.18).⁹⁶

Tierney is wary of the professionalization of various fields of study that evolve through cultural studies. He writes:

I believe the idea of professionalizing knowledge through departmental structures ought to be changed. Departments stymie interdisciplinary dialogue. Proponents of cultural studies and queer theory seek theoretical insights across academic areas. Analyses of sexual orientation need to take place beyond merely one academic area.

(1997, p.174)

I suggest that Tierney’s comments on this relate as much to transgender theorising as to queer theorising. Tierney argues that ensuring queer theorising maintains its critical edge and politically subversive agenda means resisting the push towards the institutionalisation of queer studies. He writes:

⁹⁶ Here Tierney refers to “our lives” because he is focusing on the study of homosexuality and thus includes himself, a gay man, as a subject of the study.

To the extent that academics have set off their areas of inquiry from the general public, we make an intellectual, existential and strategic blunder. We misinterpret how structures define knowledge; we overlook the call for engaged intellectuals; and we mistakenly assume that only those who hold the cultural capital can understand theoretical formulations.

(1997, p.175)

The queer theorising envisaged here is one that sustains a multi-level challenge to the status quo, and this means challenging the very institutional settings within which queer theory has evolved. In Tierney's terms, this means avoiding the complacency of simply working "for acceptance by adding queers as an ingredient in the academic stew" (p.37). A similar line of argument is taken up by Warner (1993) who is concerned to maintain the critical edge of queer, disallowing queer to become simply "a theory about queers", and arguing that queer must define "itself against the normal rather than the heterosexual, and normal includes normal business in the academy" (p.xxvi). This is not an easy task. Just at the time when queer academic writings are being published, and when transgender studies are emerging, we are suggesting yet another challenge: the challenge that those who have fought for, and finally achieved, some degree of acceptance within academia then disrupt the very institutional bases upon which their livelihoods - their possibility of tenure and future publication - depend. What is being proposed here is an Oscar Wilde style of subversion: gaining acceptance within esteemed institutions, only to undercut the power plays through which such institutional privilege is maintained.

Tierney repeatedly and explicitly draws connections between the political and the theoretical, between the academics' and the activists' reworking of "queer". He writes: "The purpose of queer studies is more than simply the production of queer theory. Queer theorists advocate change and become involved in change processes." (1997, p.62). He reminds us that although there are undoubtedly gaylesbitrans academics who "desire the professionalization of knowledge in quite standard ways" (p.62), this is not what queer studies are about. Simply because "a group of people study a queer theme does not mean that they are philosophically and intellectually bound together" (p.62),

therefore it is important to make explicit the subversive political agenda of queer studies as distinct from any other academic inquiry into things queer. This distinction may be conceptualised through Hinchey's story about the fish who wanted to understand the sea. Just as Hinchey's allegorical fish sought to understand this apparently invisible but ubiquitous medium, so queer and transgender theorists cannot afford to work unthinkingly within academic contexts. Although the fish could not stand on the beach to view the sea differently, transgender and queer theorists can simultaneously work within academia and critique the power dynamics which operate within the academic context. This means beginning with "the assumption that all work is political and what needs to be done is the unmasking of the ideological parameters in all investigative work" (Tierney, p.62). This kind of approach promises not only to study things queer but to "reconfigure what social investigation might look like", thus placing queer studies "at the heart of discussions about how the academy might change" (p.62). Tierney writes:

Just as the intellectual becomes an agent for change, so the task of social theory is not simply to illuminate different conceptual puzzles but to develop critiques that help individuals and groups to come together to effect change. We develop new ways of seeing so that categories of silence change - individuals are able to come out without the fear or consequences that currently exist, and the conceptualization of what we mean by gay or queer also changes. In effect, theory enables individuals to gain control over the means of cultural production.

(Tierney, 1997, p.174)

Tierney argues that it is important to ensure that queer studies, while being based in academia, are explicitly connected with social change through knowledge production. For this to happen, we need to approach knowledge production critically. Tierney writes, "I urge queers not to professionalize queer studies by creating for ourselves yet another set of academic departments. ... If we assume that the structures of knowledge in part have defined normalized relations that have excluded homosexuals, then we need to break those structures rather than merely reinvent them for ourselves" (p.175).

Is there particular risk of professionalising queer studies at this point in time because of the fragmentation of (humanist / liberationist) “social change movements”; because of the increased economic pressures regarding gaining employment and (unattainable) “financial security”; and because of the sense of crisis: crisis of meaning, identity, authority, knowledge? Does this late-20th-century crisis provide the very context in which it *seems* to make sense to professionalise queer - to try and attain some structural confirmation of the political gains that have enabled (some) queers to be *out* in the academy? If this is so, then perhaps we need to be more critical of the motivations behind (as well as the implications of) professionalising queer studies. Exactly what kind of (illusory) “security” or “status” might we be seeking through the professionalising of queer studies?

In this chapter I have questioned the relationship between academic theorising and political activism, suggesting that they are necessarily intertwined but can appear to be separate forces at odds with one another, especially when academic arguments are framed in obtuse language. I have also questioned the notion of social change and articulated some of my wariness about professionalising queer / trans studies. Rising to the challenges presented here would necessitate an awareness of which academic treatments of transsexuality are inspired by visions of social change and which are not: which approaches to transsexuality attempt to maintain the status quo (the transsexual as a studied object or clinical case), and which are intellectual exercises that fail to take into account the “lived realities” of transsexual people (the transsexual as allegorical queer figure, or the transsexual as the vanguard of the “Gender Revolution”).

CONCLUSION

At gender identity clinics, transsexuals are encouraged to lie about their transsexual status. ... Furthermore, they are to conceive of themselves as heterosexuals, since psychiatry cannot even begin to acknowledge male-to-female transsexual lesbians and female-to-male transsexual gay men. ... The practitioners of queer theory who are most interested in looking at the transvestite are also those most heavily influenced by psychoanalytic theory. That these scholars cannot recognize the institutional psychiatric location in which transgendered people find themselves (gender-identity clinics) is surely ironic. Expanding on Stone's remark, we can state that 'it is difficult to generate a counter-discourse if one is programmed to disappear,' and even more difficult when the theory that purports to make you visible ignores the institutional operations which underlie such programming.

(Namaste, 1996, p.197)

I do not anticipate a grand conclusion to the medley of voices and perspectives that I am here assembling. But I do hope to contribute to the burgeoning dialogue on what is still a strangely repressed and uncomfortable subject - the instability and fracturedness of our gendered, sexed, social and political selves - by showing its centrality to our attempts at developing an ethics of difference.

(Däumer, 1992, p.92)

At the beginning of this thesis, I asked: what are the issues for transsexual and transgender people in the late 1990's? To inform my answer to this question, I interviewed several transsexual and transgender people in Aotearoa / New Zealand, participated in numerous e-mail discussions with transsexual and transgender people internationally, and sought recent texts written by transgenderists about transgenderism. The central thread running through this thesis is concerned with how transsexual and transgender people articulate their positions in debates around

“gender”, transsexuality, and (trans-)politics. I have used transgender texts and interview material to show how transsexual and transgender people are currently engaging in these debates; debates where challenges to psycho-medical constructions of transsexuality are being formulated, and where aspects of queer theories are deployed. Although carried out in public fora, and often in the name of political activism, each of these debates connects ultimately with on-going discussions in academia: discussions among psycho-medical researchers and clinicians, among anthropologists and sociologists, among political scientists and philosophers, among feminists and queer theorists. Having delved critically into aspects of these various discussions, I then engaged reflexively with questions about the academic processes in which I participate. How is it relevant to discuss transgenderism in an academic context? (How) might the goals of transgender politics be served or informed by academic theorising? (To what extent) can academia provide a trans-friendly environment?

Transgender theorising needs to find the points of resistance within other forms of theorising about transsexuality - to develop a critical edge - to demonstrate the problematic theoretical underpinnings of various academic approaches to transsexuality. In this critique and selective deployment of theories of transsexuality, no perspective can afford to be disregarded. Even approaches which appear transphobic or which fail to support the transgressive aims of transgender politics are useful, either for providing insight into the reasoning behind transphobia (“know your enemy”), or for taking the strong workable theoretical points and turning them to the benefit of transgender goals.

The politics, and therefore theorising, of transgenderism must necessarily be aware of and celebrate its own diversity. That this is already occurring is suggested in Bornstein’s (1995) claim: “to attempt to divide us into rigid categories ... is like trying to apply the laws of solids to the state of fluids: it’s our fluidity that keeps us in touch with one another” (p.69). However, to be consistent with this celebration of diversity, it is necessary to be careful about the languaging of transgender theories. Defining terms and political camps, attempting to speak for others, working with structuralist / modernist assumptions about truth, language, science, and identity are all risky practices. The various agendas operating within transsexual and transgender writings

and political activities can be worked through academic texts, employing the research that has already been done to their own advantage.

One of the central threads running through this thesis has been the negotiation of tensions among competing understandings of what transsexuality *is*, what it means to *be* a man, to *be* a woman or to *be* transgendered. In negotiating these tensions, I have attempted to avoid foreclosure on important issues, to work with contradictions rather than trying to resolve them, and to highlight the risks of taking up any simplistic and fixed “stance” on the ontological and political issues raised. It follows, then, that another of the central threads running through my work is the explicit politicising of the issues discussed. Competing understandings about transsexuality / transgenderism are exposed as inevitably politically invested; even though those understandings may be couched in terms of apoliticised “science” or “knowledge”.

Working with contradictions and avoiding foreclosure on central issues has often meant suspending my own perspectives and political investments. I started this work, thinking about transsexuality and social change in terms of a variety of liberal humanist and radical political discourses. I thought that, through my doctoral research, I might simply be able to “do something worthwhile for transsexual people”, to instigate some change from which local transsexuals might benefit. As I began the transition from my behaviourist psychologist cum radical bisexual feminist positioning to develop an awareness of poststructuralist (queer and feminist) critiques of the notions of identity, gender, knowledge, and social change, I was forced (kicking and screaming) to realise that my research agendas must change. Indeed, the entire way I conceptualised what research *is* and can or cannot *do* ultimately had to change. There were times when I felt that if my research was not part of a coherent social change movement - if my work did not incorporate practical and realistic “solutions” or “suggestions for change” - then it was hardly worth doing. I can now understand this disillusionment in the context of the cynicism and crisis of meaning that characterises poststructuralist thought, contemporary politics and, ultimately, the era in which we live.

Beginning this research with strong social-change motivations, and finally writing a thesis where I try to suspend (some of) my own political investments has been a precarious juggling act. What has resulted certainly contains contradictions which are

unresolved, both in the thesis and in my own mind. On the one hand, I think such unresolved contradictions are important; they signal areas where more careful theorising needs to occur and indicate openings for future research. However, on the other hand, some of these contradictions signal areas where my own theorising comes undone, areas where my own confusion and uncertainty may be less than productive. For instance, in Chapter Twelve I allude to poststructuralist possibilities about the “intellectual” having no future and express scepticism about the viability, in the late 1990s, of social change movements. These suggestions, while important in the context of the discussion, belie my own understandings about both intellectual pursuits and social change. Perhaps, then, in this aspect of my thesis, I am less than dexterous in my juggling. In Part Five, however, where I set myself the task of both valuing and critiquing queer contributions to trans-theorising, I am better able to work productively with contradictions. Here, I can weave between practical concerns and theoretical challenges, ultimately proposing ways of conceptualising queer / trans issues which are productive and inspiring.

It is in Parts Three and Four that I work most explicitly with conflicting conceptualisations of transsexuality / transgenderism. Here, I work with an agenda of contributing to and enriching the debates already occurring in this field. One of my main concerns is to encourage interdisciplinary discussions on transsexuality / transgenderism, particularly for the purpose of enabling transgender challenges to be articulated in such a way that they might effectively subvert oppressive constructions of transsexuality (and policing of “transsexuals”).

Through this thesis I offer suggestions as to how clinical, academic, and political writings on transsexuality could more carefully work with notions of sexuality, gender and embodiment. I critique the tendency of psycho-medical researchers to overlook or oversimplify transsexuals’ erotic attractions, while completely failing to theorise the relationship between “homosexuality” and “transsexuality”. From my analysis of the heterocentric constructions of transsexuality that permeate psycho-medical texts and (some) interviewees’ talk, I conclude that heterosexism and transphobia operate in conjunction with one another. Thus, challenging heterosexism opens up ways for challenging transphobia and vice versa.

By reading the notion of being “trapped in the wrong body” in various ways, it is possible to subvert the initial attempt to oversimplify and “resolve” transsexuals’ dilemmas. Being trapped in the wrong body need not imply that one seeks a “right body”, and opting for SRS need not suggest complicity with dominant understandings of sexed embodiment. From my analysis of how various transpeople talk about being (or not being) “trapped in the wrong body”, I conclude that this notion may be deployed usefully by transpeople without constituting and investment in medical constructions of transsexuality.

The assumption that “gender” is certain and knowable represents a foundation stone in the ontologising (and pathologising) of transsexuality. Psychoanalytic concepts have been used to unsettle the positivist bases for the diagnosis and “treatment” of “gender identity disorders”, but these concepts are often rejected by transgender theorists as necessarily hostile to transpeople. I argue that transgenderists ignore attempts to problematise gender at their own peril. Developing notions of “gender fluidity” or “gender outlaw”, without approaching critically the relationship between “gender” and embodiment, leads to simplistic frameworks that do not adequately unsettle the foundations of psycho-medical constructions of gender identity.

One of the risks of failing to problematise “gender” is that transgender politics may become a politics of exclusion, falling into the same traps as other radical, identity-based political movements. Being “out” as a “gender outlaw” may be a personally empowering stance from which the rhetoric of gender fluidity can be employed, but it does little to empower or represent the many transsexuals for whom visibility may only ever be a life-threatening option. One of the ways in which transgenderists have attempted to reclaim and celebrate gender diversity has been by identifying “third gender” possibilities that have come into being at various cultural and historical junctures. Through this reclaiming, transgenderism is constructed as a cross-cultural and transhistorical phenomenon, yet transgender theorising has barely begun to address its own ethnocentricity. I challenge transgender theorising to extend itself beyond a framework of unacknowledged whiteness, and to consider how differently indigenous people may deal with the corporeal colonisation that is transsexuality. I suggest that working a politicised notion of race into transgender theorising may open up useful

ways of unsettling psycho-medical constructions of transsexuality and medico-legal approaches to transgender embodiment.

Queer theorising offers critical strategies which are potentially useful to transgenderism, but the debates around how well “queer” actually addresses issues of “sexuality” *and* “gender” suggest that queer theorising may not be the best vehicle for transgenderist academic endeavours. Another possibility is offered in the form of “outlaw theorising” which critiques identity while not becoming mired by its own useage as an identity category. The potential of “outlaw theorising” is jeopardised by any claim to *being a gender outlaw* and, even more so, by assumptions of epistemic privilege which may accompany such a claim.

In conclusion, I would like to return to one of the epistemological questions that resonate through this thesis. In Chapter Three I asked: “What kind of critique of ‘knowledge’ (and of the possibility of ‘knowing oneself as a wo/man’) must I develop in order to allow various interviewees’ articulations of *knowing* to speak to each other within the context of a doctoral thesis?” Here, I suggest that it is precisely *through a critique of knowing* that the numerous voices in this thesis have been able to speak meaningfully to one another. And it is through such an epistemological critique that further challenges to hegemonic notions of what it is to *be* transsexual - challenges which ultimately enable more complex articulations of transgender subjectivities - may be made. Such challenges are fundamental not only for how psycho-medical professionals “treat” transsexuality, not only for how transsexual / transgender / queer communities articulate their (our) politics, and not only for how transgenderism figures within the university, but also for how any-body at the turn of the 21st century understands him/herself to *be* a “man” or a “woman”.

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APPENDIX A:

Introductory letter and questionnaire.

Feminist Studies Department,
University of Canterbury,
Private Bag 4800,
Christchurch.

e mail: k.roen@gen.canterbury.ac.nz
home phone: (03) 3746167

27th February, 1996.

Hello!

Thank you for showing an interest in this questionnaire, and in the research project on transsexuality / transgenderism which the questionnaire is part of. Although I have not been in touch with you before, I have probably talked about this research with the person who gave you this letter and questionnaire. If you want to know anything about me or my work which they cannot tell you, please feel free to contact me. I am happy to talk with anyone who is interested in taking part, and encourage you to fill out this brief questionnaire if you have ever thought of yourself as transsexual / transgendered.

Please make sure that you write your name and address clearly when you send the completed questionnaire back to me. I will be contacting you over the next few months, so please use an address that will still be applicable later in the year. You are not obliged to answer all or any of the questions, and any information that you do supply will be kept confidential.

Thank you once again. I look forward to hearing back from you!

Best wishes,

Katrina Roen.

Questionnaire

Research Project on Transsexuality / Transgenderism

The aim of this project is to obtain information about the understandings of gender and of transsexuality that are held by a number of transsexual / transgendered people who live in Aotearoa / New Zealand. Information from participants will contribute to an analysis of what it means to be transsexual, which will finally be submitted in the form of a Doctoral Thesis.

This research will involve both interviews and a questionnaire. The purpose of the questionnaire is to help me to develop a picture of the various people who have expressed an interest in being interviewed as part of this project. From this picture, I hope to be able to choose as diverse a group of interviewees as possible.

The purpose of this brief questionnaire is for you to give me some information which relates to your position with regard to transsexuality / transgenderism and some details about yourself.

The information from this questionnaire will not be reproduced anywhere and will only be accessible by me (Katrina Roen). At no time will you be identified as someone who has been involved in this research project. You may at any time withdraw your participation, including withdrawal of any information you have provided. You are by no means obliged to respond to all or any of these questions. The information which you provide in this form will be destroyed at the completion of the research project.

Thank you very much for taking the time to support this research.

- 1. What is your age?
- 2. Please write down how you would best describe yourself with regard to ethnicity or culture (E.g.: Maori, Pakeha, Samoan)

.....

3. Here is a range of words that relate broadly to sexuality and gender. Please **circle** all the words you would use to describe yourself, or **write your own words** in the space below.

- | | | | | |
|--|----------------|----------------------|----------------|--------------|
| male | female | transsexual | fa'afafine | |
| hermaphrodite | intersexual | formerly transsexual | transgendered | |
| woman | man | male-to-female | female-to-male | |
| have had [some] sex reassignment surgery | post-operative | pre-operative | non-operative | |
| gay | queer | lesbian | bisexual | heterosexual |

By writing the above terms as I have, I am not meaning to imply that these are the only possibilities. I am aware that the possibilities are endless. I have only provided these words as an example. If it does not feel appropriate to you to use any of the above terms, please feel free to use the space below to give me some idea of how you would describe yourself:

.....

..

4. Please respond to the following question if you have had some or all aspects of gender reassignment surgery:

i) Approximately how long ago did you undergo gender / sex reassignment surgery?.....

5. Please respond to the following 3 questions if you have **not** had any gender reassignment surgery.

i) Have you, in the past, considered having gender reassignment surgery at all? YES / NO

ii) Are you currently considering having gender reassignment surgery? YES / NO

iii) Do you consider it as a possibility that you might want to have gender reassignment surgery at some stage in the future? YES / NO

Thank you very much for responding to these questions! I value your support of this work. I would appreciate it if you could return this to me by Sunday 31st March by posting it to me at the address below.

Katrina Roen, PhD candidate, Department of Feminist Studies, University of Canterbury, Private Bag 4800, Christchurch.

Ph: (03) 3746167

APPENDIX B:

Interview information sheet and consent form.

Information Sheet

University of Canterbury
Feminist Studies Department

You are invited to participate as an interviewee in the current research on transsexuality / transgenderism, being carried out by Katrina Roen.

The aim of these interviews is to discuss and explore understandings of gender and of transsexuality with a number of transsexual / transgendered people who live in Aotearoa / New Zealand. Information from these interviews will contribute to an analysis of what it means to be transsexual, which will finally be submitted in the form of a Doctoral Thesis.

Your participation in this project will involve taking part in an interview with me (Katrina Roen), which will take approximately one to one and a half hours, and possibly being involved in a follow-up interview. The interview(s) will be taped and I will send you a copy of the transcript for your interest. When I am further on in this research, I will also send you feedback regarding aspects of the contribution which the interviews as a whole have made.

The interviews will involve sharing your thoughts and experiences on various issues and aspects of transsexuality / transgenderism. Some examples of the kinds of topics that I would like us to discuss in the course of the interview are as follows:

- ♦ *What does it mean to you to describe yourself as:*
 - a woman / man?
 - transsexual / transgendered?

- ♦ *What were important factors for you in deciding [not] to have hormone therapy / sex reassignment surgery?*
- ♦ *Over the time that you have been considering yourself as a woman / man, how important has it been for you:*
 - *to "pass"?*
 - *to be seen as transsexual?*
 - *to NOT be seen as transsexual?*

Anonymity and Confidentiality

The results of this project may be published, but you may be assured of the complete confidentiality of data gathered in this investigation: the identity of participants will not be made public at any time.

In order to maintain anonymity and confidentiality for the participants of the current research and the information you provide, the only people who will hear the taped interviews will be myself (Katrina Roen) and, in the event of someone else being employed to transcribe some of the interviews, that person will also have access to the tapes and transcripts only for as long as they need to for the purposes of transcribing. The transcriber will be required to sign a written declaration of confidentiality regarding the information contained within the interviews. In using the material from the interviews, I will ensure no material is used that could identify you. Quotations which are likely to reveal your identity will not be used. Pseudonyms will be used in the transcripts, in the Ph.D. thesis, and in any subsequent publications.

You can contact me by calling (03) 3746167 and asking for Katrina. I will be pleased to discuss any concerns you may have about participation in this project.

*This project has been reviewed by the
University of Canterbury Human Ethics Committee.*

Consent Form

Research on Transsexuality / Transgenderism

I have read and understood the description of the research project on transsexuality / transgenderism being carried out by Katrina Roen. On this basis I agree to participate as an interviewee in the project, and I consent to the publication of information provided in the interview(s) with the understanding that anonymity will be preserved. I understand also that I may at any time withdraw from the project, including withdrawal of any information I have provided.

Signed:.....

Date:.....

I look forward to meeting with you at the following time and place for an interview. If any of the following details need to be changed, please call me as soon as possible.

Date:

Time:

Place:

Thanks!



APPENDIX C:

Interview schedule.

Areas for discussion during interview

Could you start by telling me what has motivated or inspired you to be involved in this research?

What does it mean to you to describe yourself as:

a woman / man?

transsexual / transgendered?

How do you think *other people* interpret the words:

"woman"

"man"

"transsexual"

"transgendered"

... and how is this different from how you interpret these words?

Tell me about some of the experiences you've had that have helped you to form your current understanding of these words.

Tell me about instances when other people have challenged your understanding of these words - or your understanding of what it means to be a woman / man; transsexual / transgendered person.

What do you think of the fact that some people understand transsexuality to be a disease or a disorder?

What do you think of the fact that some people see transsexuality as a transitional state, whilst others see it as a life-long identity?

What were important factors for you in deciding to [/ not to] have hormone therapy / sex reassignment surgery? When did you first start thinking about this issue? What were your initial feelings about it? [If this is still unclear:] What is your current decision with regard to whether or not to have hormone therapy / sex reassignment surgery? How important an effect does this decision have on your identity as a woman / man / transgendered person?

Over the time that you have been considering yourself as a woman / man, how important has it been for you:

- to "pass"?
- to be seen as transsexual?
- to NOT be seen as transsexual?

Some transsexual people choose purposely not to pass, and to be seen publicly (in certain situations) as transsexual. For them this may be a political statement. How do you feel about this?

I notice that you identify yourself as [ethnicity]. Some of the transsexual people I have spoken to have talked about how their cultural identity affects that way they think about their transsexuality. I wonder if you could tell me about how you see the relationship between your being [ethnicity] and [transsexual]?

APPENDIX D:

Workshop information sheet.

Information Sheet

University of Canterbury, Feminist Studies Department.

Research Project: Constructions of Transsexuality and Transgenderism.

Researcher: Katrina Roen

You are invited to participate in a workshop which is part of the current research on transsexuality / transgenderism. This workshop will be the second part of the research. The first part, which took place last year, involved a series of interviews with transsexual and transgendered people around Aotearoa / New Zealand. The aim of the interviews was to discuss and explore various understandings of gender and of transsexuality. The aim of the workshop will be to discuss, with a small group of transsexual and transgendered people, some central points which came up in the interviews. Information from the interviews and the workshop will contribute to an analysis of what it means to be transsexual, which will finally be submitted in the form of a Doctoral Thesis.

Your participation in this project will involve taking part in a workshop with three to four other transsexual and transgendered people. Only two other people will be present: a research assistant (Kaye Cederman), and me (Katrina Roen). I envisage that the workshop will take approximately one and a half hours. The workshop will be audio-taped and I will be the only person to have access to the tape, which will be destroyed two years after the completion of the workshop. When I am further on in this research, I will be happy to send you feedback regarding aspects of the contribution which the workshop has made.

The workshop will involve sharing your opinions and perspectives on various issues and aspects of transsexuality / transgenderism. As a way of getting this discussion started, I will introduce some ideas which have been expressed by other transsexual and transgendered people, such as:

- *"When we walk into a restaurant and we see another transsexual person, we look the other way, we pretend we don't exist. There's no sly smile, no secret wink, signal,*

or handshake. Not yet. We still quake in solitude at the prospect of recognition, even if that solitude is in the company of our own kind"

- ♦ *"I just feel that I am a person that's trapped in the wrong body - and you'll find that across the board as well with a lot of transsexuals."*
- ♦ *"The law dictates that you must go through surgery otherwise you can't change your gender. That's ridiculous! That's just a an old-fashioned medical dictation. They invented that rule, we didn't."*
- ♦ *"Sex categories should be removed from all basic identification papers - from driver's licenses to passports - and since the right of each person to define their own sex is so basic, it should be eliminated from birth certificates as well."*

Anonymity and Confidentiality

The results of this project may be published, but you may be assured of the complete confidentiality of data gathered in this investigation: the identity of participants will **not** be made public at any time.

In order to maintain anonymity and confidentiality for the participants of the current research and the information you provide, I (Katrina Roen) will be the only person who will hear the taped workshop. Any notes which are written by the research assistant or myself will not contain your name, will use only pseudonyms, and will be stored in a locked filing cabinet accessible only to me (Katrina Roen). In using the material from the workshop, I will ensure no material is used that could identify you. Quotations which are likely to reveal your identity will not be used. Pseudonyms will be used in the notes, in the Ph.D. thesis, and in any subsequent publications. Each workshop participant will be asked to respect the privacy of others and help maintain confidentiality, as written on the consent form (enclosed).

You can contact me by calling 3890328 and asking for Katrina. I will be pleased to discuss any concerns you may have about the participation in this project.

**You may also contact my research supervisor, Victoria Grace, by calling
3642692.**

*This project has been reviewed by the
University of Canterbury Human Ethics Committee.*

APPENDIX E:

Workshop consent forms.

Please bring this consent form to the workshop!

Participants' Consent Form

Research on Transsexuality / Transgenderism

I have read and understood the description of the research project on transsexuality / transgenderism being carried out by Katrina Roen. On this basis I agree to participate in the workshop which is part of this project, and I consent to the publication of information provided in this workshop with the understanding that anonymity will be preserved. I also agree to help maintain confidentiality by not disclosing (to anyone outside the workshop) names of, or information about, other workshop participants. I understand also that I may at any time withdraw from the project, including withdrawal of any information I have provided.

Signed:.....

Date:.....

Thanks! ☺

Research Assistant's Consent Form

Research on Transsexuality / Transgenderism

I have read and understood the information on the workshop which is part of the research project on transsexuality / transgenderism being carried out by Katrina Roen. On this basis I agree to be present at the workshop as a research assistant / observer. I also agree to help maintain confidentiality by not disclosing (to anyone outside the workshop) names of, or information about, the workshop participants.

Signed:.....

Date:.....

Thanks! ☺

APPENDIX F:

Workshop Plan.

Introductions

The workshop began with introductions which included the following points:

- . Introducing the people present.
- . Venue - location of toilets, explanation of room layout.
- . Introducing the purpose of the workshop.
- . Talking briefly about the proposed format and length of the workshop.
- . Setting the tone - inviting questions, suggestions, interruptions.
- . Re-stating points about respect, confidentiality and opportunity to withdraw.
- . Introduce idea of writing a response if it does not feel comfortable to say something to the whole group at the time.

First Activity

After the introductions were completed, the first activity began. The purpose of this was to introduce some discussion of ideas, allowing the participants to warm up slowly and gain confidence and familiarity with each other. The format of this activity was that Kaye read out some quotations from transsexual and transgendered people and the participants were encouraged to respond to each quotation with questions such as: What is your response to this? How do you feel about what this person is saying? Do you agree with what they are saying?

Quotations used were:

I think when you become therapy-smart, you don't care what [medical people say] . They could call it Banjo's ... they could call it whatever they like - if at the end of the day, you've got that op - you don't care, you play whatever game [you need to].
(Tania)

Sex categories should be removed from all basic identification papers - from driver's licenses to passports - and since the right of each person to define their own sex is so basic, it should be eliminated from birth certificates as well (Feinberg, 1996, p. 125).

You should be able to change your sex legally without having to have SRS

When asked what was a main reason she had decided to go for surgery, Tania said:

... it's a goal. It sets me an almost tangible goal to aim for because ... [anything else about changing genders] is almost too abstract to hold up as a goal. ... [but] For me the surgery is a small part of it. It's almost like a marathon. The race is more important than the cup at the end of it. It's the cup-cum-vagina [that] is your reward, but having run a good race is the true aim.

Second Activity

The purpose of the second activity was to begin introducing more personal elements to the discussion, and to provide the option of moving about, thus encouraging the participants to feel more comfortable in the room. I was aware that an activity involving movement in this way was also potentially more challenging, so I introduced it cautiously, emphasising that it was alright for anyone to choose not to take part, or for the whole group to decide not to do this activity⁹⁷.

The second activity involved marking an imaginary line across the room and identifying three points along that line with the following statements:

This is really the main theme I'm on is: transsexuals like myself, [are / were] trapped in the wrong body. (Babe)

*[Saying that we are trapped in the wrong body] just seems a little oversimplified I suppose. ... I mean [it's an] easy way to describe it to someone who doesn't know ... [but] I don't know whether we're **trapped**. (Jim)*

⁹⁷ As it happened, everybody did take part in this activity, and noone physically withdrew from any activity throughout the workshop.

To me there's no need to say that [I'm trapped in the wrong body]. There's no need to feel that. ... I mean there's heaps of ... transgendered people that have got on in life quite OK without having to do the surgical thing because the law dictates that you must otherwise you can't [legally] change your gender. That's ridiculous. .. That's just a an old-fashioned medical dictation. They invented that rule, we didn't. (Myra)

The participants were then asked to stand somewhere on the line, indicating their level of agreement or disagreement with each statement. Having each chosen a place to stand, they were encouraged to discuss the issues raised by the quotations using questions such as: How do you feel about the statement you are standing nearest? How do you feel about the statement you are standing farthest from? How is your perspective on this issue different from / similar to that of the person standing nearest you?

Break

Third Activity

Following the break, discussion was initiated using Feinberg's statement:

It is important that each person have the right to define, determine, or change their sex in any way they choose - whether female, male or any point on the spectrum between (1996, p.103).

Questions I had prepared to use to encourage discussion⁹⁸ include: Do you agree with this? Do you think it is important to have any guidelines or regulations around this? What about people who are born intersexual: does this mean that their parents can choose to change their sex any way they want? What about people who are mentally ill and may not be able to make a decision like this? What could be put in place to protect

⁹⁸ The discussion was actually so enthusiastic that I hardly had to ask any questions, and had to assertively say that it was time to move on to the next activity.

people from rushing into this and finding out too late that they have made the wrong decision?

Fourth Activity

During the fourth and final activity, I introduced various ideas which Kate Bornstein asserts as transgender politics in her book “Gender Outlaw”, then I contrasted this with a statement made by Tania during our interview. The ideas I introduced prior to the group discussion were as follows.

Some key points from Kate Bornstein:

- . We live in a society that tries to force us to choose either / or, but we don’t necessarily fit into those categories.
- . As transsexuals, we spend the first part of our lives trying to live a lie, pretending that we are the little “boy” or “girl” that our parents think we are. Once we go through the transition, we are then told we have to lie more, to make up past memories as though we were always the sex that we now live as. We are told we have to lie and pretend not to be transsexual.
- . This system where transsexuality is hidden, and where the only visible ways of being are “male” and “female” is oppressing us.
- . One way that we can fight this oppressive system is to refuse to keep lying, to refuse to pass all the time as men or women. We can fight this oppressive system by living openly and proudly as transgendered or transsexual.

Contrasted with the message that transsexual people let one another down when they don’t pass well, as expressed by Tania:

When you’re sitting in a room full of people in dresses who are trying to look stunning, trying to look nice, and there’s this bony person sitting there with a balding head and everything like this you kind of think “My God, what are you doing?” ... because you know amongst yourselves that you are trying to maintain a standard and she’s not pulling it - which is cruel in itself because she’s trying, she’s just at her own level. She’s wearing knickers and for her that is monumental and so ... often those

support groups don't work because you feed into one another's psychosis. And you just mind-fuck one another.

The discussion of this topic was focused to some extent around the following questions:

- How do you feel about Kate's idea that it is really important for transsexual and transgendered people to "come out" and be open about their genders?
- How do you feel about Tania's comment about the difficulty of meeting in a group with other trans people?
- Does Kate's suggestion sound like a good start to changing attitudes about transsexuality, and making life easier for trans people in the future?
- What other ways can you think of that life could be made easier for trans people now and in the future?

Conclusion

At the conclusion of the workshop, there was a quick round where everyone spoke about the changes s/he would like to see in Christchurch or in New Zealand for transsexual people or people who are living outside of traditional genders. I also said to the group that any feedback on the process of the workshop would be useful, particularly if there were aspects of the workshop that proved to be uncomfortable for any participant. Finally, I thanked the participants.

APPENDIX G:

Statement of Research Aims guiding initial exploratory phase.

The first aim of the current research involves developing an understanding of what gender identity and transsexuality mean to transsexual people and learning about the discourses within which transsexuals insert themselves in order to make sense of, and construct, their experiences.

Issues and questions considered include:

- ♦ What are the various understandings of gender identity and of transsexuality held by transsexual people?
- ♦ Into what discourses do transsexual people insert themselves in order to make sense of their experiences of gender?
- ♦ In what way do these various discourses inform transsexuals' construction of their experiences?

The second aim involves studying the discourses which are currently shaping transsexuality for the purpose of developing an understanding of the political forces which affect the lives of individual transsexuals.

Issues and questions considered include the following:

- ♦ What are the key discourses which shape contemporary understandings of transsexuality?
- ♦ How is the transsexual subject constructed through these discourses?
- ♦ Where is there room for resistance, by transgenderists, to this construction?
- ♦ What political implications do these discourses hold for transsexuals?
- ♦ Political issues include:
 - i. construction of transsexuality as unstable / unhealthy.
 - ii. construction of SRS as cure and therefore as necessary / compulsory.
 - iii. understanding of transsexuality as a transitional state, implying that a compulsory choice M/F must ultimately be made.

Finally, I explore the question of how bodies are currently constructed within Western society through various dominant discourses, and what the political implications are of the visible, vocal, corporeal challenges to this construction which some transsexuals appear to be making.

Issues and questions considered include:

- ♦ What is the significance to transsexuals' understandings of transsexuality of the various discourses through which bodies are constructed?
 - ♦ What kinds of discourses, about bodies and about transgenderism, are being articulated by those transgenderists who appear to present visible and corporeal challenges to traditional constructions of sexed bodies?
 - ♦ What are the implications of this challenge to other transsexuals and to people who have never questioned the way in which their bodies are sexed, or the relationship between that and their gender identity?
 - ♦ How do transsexuals' understandings of the relationship between their gender identity and their anatomy differ across cultural groups, class groups, MTF compared with FTM, educational groups, sexuality groups ...?
-